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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	01/03 Bodies pile up China amid Covid surge
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SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/bodies-pile-up-in-china-as-covid-surge-overwhelms-crematoriums/ar-AA15V3Gi
GIST	<p>(Bloomberg) -- For five days the elderly Chinese lady's corpse lay decomposing in the Shanghai house she shared with her family before a hearse finally arrived to take away her remains.</p> <p>"We're lucky it's the cold winter time," a relative said last week at Shanghai's Longhua Funeral Home, recounting the ordeal as the family waited their turn to say goodbye along with roughly 300 other masked mourners, many of whom asked not to be identified discussing sensitive issues. While the octogenarian woman didn't die of Covid-19, the explosion of cases across China is overwhelming crematoriums, making it hard for anyone to find an open slot.</p> <p>Public notices at Longhua over the weekend explained that the crematorium had received more than 500 corpses on that day, roughly five times more than it typically handles, according to one funeral goer. After hours of waiting, each family was given five-to-10 minutes to mourn in a no-frills ceremony, fighting for space in a cramped room with bodies laying on stretchers, zipped up in yellow body bags.</p> <p>The brisk pace of business — families ushered in and out on a de facto assembly line — robbed the bereaved of the dignity typically on display at funerals in China. Aside from mourners and staff, a lone flower vendor loitered around selling small bouquets for 50 yuan (\$7.25) a pop, before he was shooed away.</p> <p>"The whole system is paralyzed right now," said an employee who answered the phone at the Shanghai crematorium last week, the only number it has listed. "Things here are busier than anyone can handle."</p> <p>Similar scenes are playing out at funeral homes across China, where a seemingly endless flow of grieving families and exhausted workers tell the real story of Covid's toll on the world's second-biggest economy. President Xi Jinping's administration has officially acknowledged only about a dozen Covid deaths since it abandoned strict pandemic controls at the beginning of December, prompting governments around the world to impose restrictions on Chinese travelers.</p> <p>While nobody knows the true extent of fatalities, it's clear funeral homes in major cities are already at capacity – and some experts warn that the worst is yet to come. Airfinity Ltd., a London-based research firm that focuses on predictive health analytics, estimated that China could see Covid deaths rise from around 9,000 a day now to as many as 25,000 a day later in January, when a rebound in travel is expected to occur during Lunar New Year festivities.</p> <p>The deluge of deaths is another blow to Xi, who touted his Covid Zero policy as more humane and morally superior than the US and Europe, which saw large amounts of elderly people die in the early stages of the pandemic. He shifted course abruptly after spontaneous protests against lockdowns erupted simultaneously in key cities around the country.</p> <p>In a New Year's address, Xi acknowledged that the pandemic "has not been an easy journey for anyone." He warned of tough times ahead and nodded at the social discontent, saying it was "only natural" for China's 1.4 billion people to have different concerns and views on some issues. "What matters is that we build consensus through communication and consultation," Xi said.</p> <p>The difficulty in putting loved ones to rest threatens to further exacerbate social tensions. Interviews with workers at funeral homes in Beijing and Shanghai, where furnace ovens are now operating through the night, showed the wait for a spot to cremate a loved one now extends well into mid-January.</p> <p>At Shanghai's Longhua Funeral Home, some families last month arrived as early as 3 a.m. for one of 200 queue numbers that were handed out at noon. Besieged by requests, Longhua announced an online booking system on Dec. 27, allowing families to wait for a phone call and avoid long lines.</p> <p>"But there's no guarantee of when it can happen," said one employee. "We can't give people a date for cremation at this point. You just have to join the queue first."</p>

‘I Shall Find an Empty Patch’

In Beijing, where the government said last week the Covid outbreak has peaked, police turned away people from funeral homes in the northern districts of Miyun and Huairou. The Civil Affairs Bureau in southeastern Tongzhou district told Chinese media on Dec. 22 that its main funeral home was burning around 140-150 bodies daily, up from 40 per day in the past.

The situation has gotten so grim that some people have sought to take things into their own hands.

“I’ve tried multiple paths to cremate my father but none have worked,” said a Dec. 28 WeChat message from a Shanghai resident to her neighborhood group chat, according to [screenshots](#) widely shared on social media. “The funeral services hotline told me that all cremation slots are full until after the new year. Since national law doesn’t allow patients who die of infectious diseases to be stored at home, I shall find an empty patch in our neighborhood to cremate my father. If you have problems with this, please call the police.”

Local officials eventually intervened to expedite the case after fervent protests from the neighborhood, according to screenshots of subsequent messages in the group chat. Bloomberg News has been unable to independently verify the episode.

Even the rich are having a tough time. [Mao Daqing](#), a well-known figure in China’s property and tech circles and the founder of office space provider Ucommune International Ltd., [spoke of the struggle](#) finding a cremation spot after the sudden passing of an elderly family member.

“The sheer difficulty of cremation and burial entirely surpassed my imagination,” he wrote on Dec. 21 on his WeChat public account. Later, on his individual timeline, he posted again: “Just this morning, six people approached me to help them find cremation, another three urgently required Pfizer, and three more were in dire need of ICU beds. That’s the real status quo of Beijing.”

The father-in-law of prominent economist and Tsinghua University professor Hu Angang, who passed away on Dec. 21 from Covid-induced pneumonia, waited hours for an ambulance to take him to the hospital, according to a close friend’s account posted on China’s Weibo social media platform. He then struggled to secure a spot at the prestigious Babaoshan Funeral Home, where top Communist Party leaders including former president Jiang Zemin have been cremated.

“Beijing’s Babaoshan has 200-300 bodies waiting to be burned each day, and there’s no way to join the queue today; there’s no hearse; no farewell ceremony; his children’s only wish is that he can be cremated alone,” the post said. “The family is heartbroken.” Hu didn’t respond to an email seeking comment.

A whole gray economy has emerged to cater to those who are desperate to bury their loved ones. Everything is an opportunity for profit: scalpers hawk queue numbers to skip lines for cremation, rent out hearses and offer all-in-one packages at exorbitant rates. Some trumpet their connections to workers at various crematories and hospitals.

‘Bodies Are Overflowing Everywhere’

When Bloomberg News called one such provider named De Shun Xiang in Beijing, an employee said cremation can be arranged within three days at the cost of 68,000 yuan, with same-day service going for 88,000 yuan. Normally it would cost around a few thousand yuan.

“Bodies are overflowing everywhere,” said the employee, who asked not be named. “You’ll have to wait a month if not.”

While funeral homes warn against trusting brokerage services, some middlemen are using creative ways to reach anguished families. On Douyin, China’s version of TikTok, videos featuring colorful visuals and stirring music advertise Mercedes-Benz hearses, elaborate burial clothes and Babaoshan cremation slots.

	<p>“We couldn’t afford to live under lockdown,” wrote a person on Weibo, sharing a view commonly expressed on the social-media platform over the past few weeks. “And now we can’t afford to die.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/03 More bosses order workers back to office
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/more-bosses-order-workers-back-to-the-office-as-job-market-shifts-11672689665
GIST	<p>Employers are losing their patience with empty desks in the office.</p> <p>Companies including investment giant Vanguard Group, workplace technology company Paycom Software Inc. and others have sent directives to employees in recent weeks, urging workers to follow existing hybrid schedules or to come into the office on additional days in 2023, according to internal memos viewed by The Wall Street Journal and interviews with employees. In some cases, bosses have told those who fail to comply that they could face termination within weeks.</p> <p>Employees at some companies have challenged new directives in corporate all-hands sessions. Those pushing to remain at home say they find in-office work unproductive and commuting inefficient. Employers, meanwhile, say bringing workers back together is important because it helps with issues such as problem solving, training new hires and reinforcing corporate culture.</p> <p>“There’s a little bit of a tug of war going on right now,” said David Garfield, global head of industries at consulting firm AlixPartners, who has worked with executives on how to approach return-to-office discussions. “Employers are not having an easy time of it.”</p> <p>For much of the pandemic, companies took a fairly soft approach to policy enforcement, fearful that too rigid a stance on in-office work could harm morale or lead to turnover, executives and advisers said. Although companies set office policies, some managers largely allowed workers to ignore them, workers and human-resources executives say. The average office occupancy in 10 major U.S. cities remained below 50% for much of 2022, according to data from security firm Kastle Systems.</p> <p>As the job market shifts under threat of a recession, employees’ leverage over companies may be slipping, human-resources advisers say, empowering bosses to push for changes in work styles.</p> <p>Surveys have shown that most employees are willing to work in an office at least a few days a week, and many workers say they see benefits of being in an office. Some employers say enforcing the rules is a matter of fairness to the workers who have been complying.</p> <p>At Vanguard Group, based outside of Philadelphia, leaders sent a memo to employees in December saying many staffers hadn’t been following the company’s requirement to work in offices on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.</p> <p>“Uneven and inconsistent adoption has created inequities in how the model is applied and has made it difficult to realize the benefits of in-person learning, collaboration and connection,” the company said, according to a memo viewed by the Journal.</p> <p>In the days that followed, some Vanguard employees say they were told by their managers that if they didn’t comply with the return-to-office policy, they would be terminated in the coming weeks and not receive severance.</p> <p>At a recent departmental all-hands meeting at Vanguard, a recording of which was shared with the Journal, one team leader told employees that the company was open to shifting its return-to-office policy, but that executives wanted to at least try working in a hybrid manner. The team leader said it wouldn’t be fair to allow some employees to flout the rules. The manager acknowledged that some top performers wouldn’t want to work in a hybrid environment.</p>

In a statement, a Vanguard spokeswoman said that the company had implemented a hybrid model to capture the benefits of flexibility with an in-person environment, and that the company's collaborative culture is critical for the experience of both clients and employees.

Others are asking employees to work full time in an office. At Oklahoma City-based workplace technology company Paycom Software, some members of the technology team were told recently that they would need to work in an office five days a week beginning as early as January, according to a memo viewed by the Journal. Bosses said in the memo that with a number of critical projects, teams needed to perform at their highest level.

At Paycom, nearly 80% of the company's employees are already working five days a week at the company's headquarters, a spokesman said. Many employees began returning to the office in August 2021.

"From the start of the pandemic, Paycom communicated that working from home would be a temporary solution while we prioritized everyone's health and well-being," a spokesman said. "We are excited to have our final few departments join their colleagues in office."

Several large New York banks, including Goldman Sachs Group Inc., GS -0.01% decrease; red down pointing triangle took a hard-line approach earlier in the pandemic and pushed to get employees back together. The result is that offices now look largely like they did before Covid-19, executives say.

"We have nudged, cajoled, evolved," David Solomon, Goldman Sachs's chief executive, said at The Wall Street Journal's CEO Council Summit in December. "But the bottom line is, we generally are operating pretty close to the way we operated before the pandemic."

When hiring new employees, some companies are now explicit about on-site requirements. In initial interviews for roles at LifePro Financial Services Inc. in San Diego, candidates are told that the job is "100% in-office," said Heather Ulz, LifePro's chief executive.

The roughly 40-person company worked remotely early in the pandemic, although burnout increased and productivity slipped for some employees, Ms. Ulz said. She brought people back full time in the summer of 2020, even as some pushed for the continuation of remote work.

Over time, almost a third of the firm's employees quit after deciding the office policy wasn't for them, Ms. Ulz said. It can now take longer to fill positions because of some candidates' preferences for hybrid or remote work. But overall, Ms. Ulz, said the firm's culture and camaraderie are improved by in-person work, and she sees benefits of colleagues being able to overhear each other or offer impromptu help.

Ms. Ulz, who was ahead of most employers in pushing for office attendance, said many of her industry peers are now asking for her input on how to bring their own employees into offices more.

"The biggest question is: 'How do you guys do it?'" she said.

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HEADLINE	01/03 WHO seeks details China Covid wave
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-state-media-plays-down-severity-covid-wave-before-who-meeting-2023-01-03/
GIST	<p>BEIJING/HONG KONG/GENEVA, Jan 3 (Reuters) - State media in China played down the severity of a surge of COVID-19 infections ahead of an expected briefing on Tuesday by its scientists to the World Health Organization, which is hoping for a "detailed discussion" on the evolution of the virus.</p> <p>China's abrupt U-turn on COVID controls on Dec. 7, as well as the accuracy of its case and mortality data, have come under increasing scrutiny at home and abroad.</p>

China's foreign ministry labelled travel entry curbs imposed by some countries as "[simply unreasonable](#)", saying they "lacked scientific basis".

"We are willing to improve communication with the world," foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning told reporters in Beijing.

"But ... we are firmly opposed to attempts to manipulate the epidemic prevention and control measures for political purposes, and will take corresponding measures in different situations according to the principle of reciprocity."

China's shift away from a "zero-COVID" policy that had been championed by President Xi Jinping followed protests that had marked the strongest show of public defiance during his decade in power and had coincided with the economy's slowest growth in nearly half a century.

As the virus spreads unchecked, funeral parlours have reported a spike in demand for their services and international health experts predict at least one million deaths in China this year.

China reported three new COVID deaths for Monday, taking its official death toll since the pandemic began to 5,253.

On Tuesday, the People's Daily, the Communist Party's official newspaper, cited Chinese experts as saying the illness caused by the virus was relatively mild for most people.

"Severe and critical illnesses account for 3% to 4% of infected patients currently admitted to designated hospitals in Beijing," Tong Zhaohui, vice president of the Beijing Chaoyang Hospital, told the newspaper.

Kang Yan, head of West China Tianfu Hospital of Sichuan University, said that in the past three weeks, a total of 46 patients had been admitted to intensive care units, or about 1% of symptomatic infections.

The emergencies area at the Zhongshan Hospital in Shanghai was packed with patients on Tuesday, a Reuters witness said.

Some were in beds in the corridor receiving IV treatment while dozens were queuing around them, waiting to see a doctor. It was unclear how many were there with COVID.

WHO MEETING

The World Health Organization has urged Chinese health officials to regularly [share specific and real-time information](#) on the outbreak.

The WHO has invited Chinese scientists to present detailed data on viral sequencing at a technical advisory group meeting on Tuesday. It has also asked China to share data on hospitalizations, deaths and vaccinations.

Ahead of the meeting scheduled for Tuesday afternoon Geneva time, a WHO spokesperson said that a "detailed discussion" was expected about circulating variants in China, and globally, with Chinese scientists expected to make a presentation.

But some experts doubted that China would be very forthright.

"I don't think China will be very sincere in disclosing information," said Alfred Wu, associate professor at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at National University of Singapore.

"They would rather just keep it to themselves or they would say nothing happened, nothing is new. My own sense is that we could assume that there is nothing new ... but the problem is China's transparency issue is always there."

The United States, France, and others will require COVID tests on travellers from China, while Belgium said it would test wastewater from planes for new variants.

European Union health officials will meet on Wednesday on a coordinated response.

China will stop requiring inbound travellers to go into quarantine from Jan. 8. But it will still demand a pre-departure test.

'DANGEROUS WEEKS'

As Chinese workers and shoppers fall ill, concerns mount about near-term growth prospects in the world's second-largest economy, causing volatility in [global financial markets](#).

A survey released on Tuesday showed China's [factory activity](#) shrank last month.

December shipments from Foxconn's [\(2317.TW\)](#) Zhengzhou iPhone plant, disrupted by worker departures and unrest amid a COVID outbreak, [were 90% of the firm's initial plans](#).

A "[bushfire](#)" of infections in China in coming months is likely to hurt its economy this year and drag global growth lower, said the head of the International Monetary Fund, Kristalina Georgieva.

"China is entering the most dangerous weeks of the pandemic," warned Capital Economics analysts.

Mobility data suggested that economic activity was depressed nationwide and would likely remain so until infections subside, they added.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism said the 52.71 million domestic trips during the New Year holiday generated 26.52 billion yuan (\$3.84 billion), up 4% year-on-year but were only about 35% of the last pre-pandemic year in 2019.

Expectations are higher for the big Lunar New Year holiday, late this month, when some experts predict infections will have peaked in many places.

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HEADLINE	01/03 Russia mulls Iran exploding drones?
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/putin-zelenskyy-politics-russia-government-ukraine-war-f57d7f47ca38d6b4ff57f8f382cec919?utm_source=homepage&utm_medium=TopNews&utm_campaign=position_05
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia is preparing to step up its attacks on Ukraine using Iranian-made exploding drones, according to Ukraine's president, as Moscow looks for ways to keep up the pressure on Kyiv after at least 63 Russian soldiers were killed in an attack in the latest battlefield setback for the Kremlin's war strategy.</p> <p>"We have information that Russia is planning a prolonged attack by Shaheds (exploding drones)," President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address late Monday.</p> <p>He said the goal is to break Ukraine's resistance by "exhausting our people, (our) air defense, our energy," more than 10 months after Russia invaded its neighbor.</p> <p>Russian President Vladimir Putin appears to be exploring ways to regain momentum in his flawed war effort, which in recent months has been undermined by a Ukrainian counteroffensive backed by Western-supplied weapons. That has brought sharp rebukes in some Russian circles of the military's performance.</p> <p>In the latest embarrassment for the Kremlin, Ukrainian forces fired rockets at a facility in the eastern Donetsk region where Russian soldiers were stationed, killing 63 of them, according to Russia's Defense Ministry. Other, unconfirmed reports put the death toll much higher.</p>

It was one of the deadliest attacks on the Kremlin's forces since the war began more than 10 months ago.

In the attack, Ukrainian forces fired six rockets from a HIMARS launch system and two of them were shot down, a Russian Defense Ministry statement said.

However, the Strategic Communications Directorate of Ukraine's Armed Forces claimed Sunday that around 400 mobilized Russian soldiers were killed in a vocational school building in Makiivka and about 300 more were wounded. That claim couldn't be independently verified. The Russian statement said the strike occurred "in the area of Makiivka" and didn't mention the vocational school.

Satellite photos analyzed by The Associated Press show the apparent aftermath of the strike. An image from Dec. 20 showed the building standing. An image from Jan. 2 showed the building reduced to rubble. Other days had intense cloud cover, making seeing the site by standard satellite imagery impossible.

For the Russian military, the Iranian-made exploding drones are a cheap weapon which also spreads fear among troops and civilians. The United States and its allies have sparred with Iran over Tehran's role in allegedly supplying Moscow with the drones.

The Institute for the Study of War said that Putin is looking to strengthen support for his strategy among key voices in Russia.

"Russia's air and missile campaign against Ukraine is likely not generating the Kremlin's desired information effects among Russia's nationalists," the think tank said late Monday.

"Such profound military failures will continue to complicate Putin's efforts to appease the Russian pro-war community and retain the dominant narrative in the domestic information space," it added.

Zelenskyy warned that in the coming weeks, "the nights may be quite restless."

He added that during the first two days of the new year, which were marked by relentless nighttime drone attacks on Ukrainian cities and energy infrastructure, the country's forces shot down more than 80 Iranian-made drones.

As well as hoping to wear down resistance to Russia's invasion, the long-range bombardments have targeted the power grid to leave civilians at the mercy of biting winter weather as power outages ripple across the country.

"Every downed drone, every downed missile, every day with electricity for our people and minimal shutdown schedules are exactly such victories," Zelenskyy said.

In the latest fighting, a Russian missile strike overnight on the city of Druzhkivka in the partially occupied eastern Donetsk region wounded two people, the deputy head of Ukraine's presidential office, Kyrylo Tymoshenko, reported Tuesday.

Officials said the attack ruined an ice hockey arena described as the largest hockey and figure skating school in Ukraine.

Overnight Russian shelling was also reported in the northeastern Kharkiv region and the southeastern Dnipropetrovsk region.

In the recently retaken areas of the southern Kherson region, Russian shelling on Monday killed two people and wounded nine others, Kherson's Ukrainian governor, Yaroslav Yanushevich, said Tuesday. He said the Russian forces fired at the city of Kherson 32 times on Monday.

HEADLINE	01/03 Omicron subvariant XBB.1.5 to drive surge?
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/03/health/covid-variant-xbb-explainer/index.html
GIST	<p>For weeks, scientists have been watching a slew of Omicron descendants duke it out for dominance of Covid-19 transmission in the United States, with the BQs – BQ.1 and BQ.1.1 – seeming to edge out all the others to claim a slight lead.</p> <p>The result has been a gradual rise in cases and hospitalizations that never seemed to reach the peaks of this summer’s BA.5 wave and was certainly nothing like the tsunami of illness caused by the original Omicron strain a year ago.</p> <p>But on Friday, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Covid-19 variant dashboard revealed a new dark horse that could soon sweep the field: XBB.1.5.</p> <p>The CDC estimates that XBB.1.5 has more than doubled its share of the Covid-19 pie each week for the last four, rising from about 4% to 41% of new infections over the month of December. In the Northeast, the CDC estimates, XBB.1.5 is causing 75% of new cases.</p> <p>“For a few months now, we haven’t seen a variant that’s taken off at that speed,” said Pavitra Roychoudhury, director of Covid-19 sequencing at the University of Washington School of Medicine’s virology lab.</p> <p>Virologists and epidemiologists say this Omicron sublineage has features that give it the potential to drive a new surge of Covid-19 cases in the US, although it’s still unclear how large that wave will be and whether it could send many more people to the hospital.</p> <p>For all the recent concern that a new Covid-19 threat could come from China’s ongoing surge, experts point out that XBB.1.5 appears to have arisen in the United States. It was first detected in New York and Connecticut in late October, according to GISAID, a global effort to catalog and track variants of the coronavirus.</p> <p>Trevor Bedford, a professor of computational biology at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center in Seattle, said XBB.1.5 has a growth rate similar to that of its distant cousin BA.5.</p> <p>Bedford has pegged its effective reproductive number – the number of new infections expected to be caused by each infected person – at about 1.6, roughly 40% higher than its next closest competitor.</p> <p>“I expect it to drive increased circulation in the coming weeks,” Bedford wrote in an email. That increase may not be reflected in case numbers, he pointed out, since more people are testing at home, and their cases may not be counted unless they seek medical care and get a lab test to confirm their results. “So I’d look to hospitalizations in the vulnerable age groups [such as seniors] as better indicator of wave,” he wrote.</p> <p>Slippery subvariants</p> <p>XBB.1.5 is the product of recombination: Two descendants of BA.2, the subvariant that drove a modest wave of cases in the US in April, swapped pieces of their genetic code, resulting in 14 new mutations to the virus’ spike proteins compared with BA.2, and a new sublineage, XBB.</p> <p>XBB drove a wave of cases in Singapore this fall but never gained much ground in the US. Here, it had to compete against a slew of co-circulating variants that had each independently evolved some of the same mutations, making them more equally matched.</p> <p>Still, scientists have been keeping a close eye on XBB and its spinoffs.</p> <p>Dr. David Ho, professor of microbiology and immunology at Columbia University, recently tested viruses engineered to have the spikes of XBB and XBB.1 as well as BQ.1 and BQ 1.1 in his lab against antibodies from the blood of people who’d been infected, who were vaccinated with the original and new bivalent</p>

vaccines, and who'd been both infected and vaccinated. His team also tested 23 monoclonal antibody treatments against these new sublineages.

He found that XBB.1 was the slipperiest of them all. It was 63 times less likely to be neutralized by antibodies in the blood of infected and vaccinated people than BA.2 and 49 times less likely to be neutralized compared with BA.4 and BA.5.

In terms of immune evasion, Ho says, these variants have shifted as far away from the antibodies we have made to use against them as the original Omicron variant was from the Covid-19 viruses that preceded it roughly a year ago.

He calls these levels of immune evasion "alarming" and said they could further compromise the efficacy of the Covid-19 vaccines. His findings were recently [published](#) in the journal Cell.

Ho said Monday that XBB.1.5 was the same story in terms of antibody evasion as XBB.1, which means it has the potential to escape the protections of vaccinations and past infections. It's also resistant to all current antibody treatments, including Evusheld.

Another trick up its sleeve

In addition to being highly immune evasive, XBB.1.5 has an additional trick up its sleeve that seems to be helping to fuel its growth. It has a key mutation at site 486, which allows it to bind more tightly to ACE2, the doors the virus uses to enter our cells.

"The mutation is clearly letting XBB.1.5 spread better," Jesse Bloom, a computational virologist at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center, wrote in an email.

This mutation was first flagged by Bloom, who studies the evolution of viruses and viral proteins, as one that could be important for viral fitness. It has been confirmed by Yunlong Cao at Peking University.

"It's got a better ability to get into cells," Roychoudhury said, which means it's more infectious.

Still, experts say it's hard to know how much of XBB.1.5's growth can be attributed to properties of the virus and how much simply to good timing.

Coming out of the holidays, during which time people were more likely to travel and socialize, gives any infection – whether it's the flu, Covid-19 or RSV – more room to run.

"Most public health officials would have expected an increase in Covid-19 cases, even before we knew about XBB.1.5," said Andrew Pekosz, a professor at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health who studies viral replication. "So whether the increases in Covid cases that are occurring during the holidays are occurring because of the social interactions that people have had or whether they're specifically related to XBB.1.5 is still something that isn't clear. Both of those things are probably contributing."

Most experts said that while they expect that XBB.1.5 has the potential to cause more illness, they don't expect those infections to necessarily be more severe.

Looking at the Northeast, where XBB.1.5 is thought to be causing the majority of infections, Michael Osterholm, who directs the University of Minnesota's Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy, sees reason for hope.

Osterholm notes that the updated boosters should provide some protection, even against this highly immune evasive strain.

"They still provide a level of immunity that may not prevent you from getting infected but may have a significant impact on whether or not you become seriously ill and die," he said. "I mean, right now, the

	<p>most recent data we have shows that for those who have the bivalent vaccine, they have a three-fold lower risk of dying than those who don't."</p> <p>Americans have been slow to get the new boosters, however. According to CDC data, only 15% of Americans who are eligible have had an updated booster. Among seniors – those age 65 and older – only about 1 in 3 have had an updated shot.</p> <p>Experts also note that although antibody treatments won't work against this sublineage, other antivirals, such as Paxlovid and remdesivir, should still be effective.</p> <p>Rapid tests continue to work, as do masks, and ventilation and filtration of indoor air, so even as the virus continues to evolve, there are still good ways to protect yourself from getting Covid-19.</p> <p>"It doesn't appear to be causing any more severe illness, and so I think that it's a very different situation circulating today than had it been a year ago," Osterholm said. "There's so much more immunity in the population that I don't think that it's going to take off."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/03 Day 314 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/03/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-314-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukraine has said 10 units of enemy equipment were destroyed in the New Year's Day attack on a complex in the Russian-occupied city of Makiivka. "On December 31, up to 10 units of enemy military equipment of various types were destroyed and damaged" in the town of Makiivka in the eastern region of Donetsk, the general staff of Ukraine's armed forces said in a statement. It said the human "losses" were still being established. • The attack on Makiivka killed dozens of recently mobilised troops sent by Moscow, in what could be one of the deadliest known incidents involving Russian conscripts so far. Ukraine's military command said up to 400 Russian soldiers were killed in the incident in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region, but this claim was not independently verified. Russia's defence ministry said 63 Russian soldiers died when Ukraine hit "a temporary deployment facility" with four US-supplied Himars missiles. • Satellite images taken by US-based company Planet Labs that purportedly showing the aftermath of the strike on Makiivka have circulated online, showing the building that allegedly housed the Russian troops before and after it was hit. The images, dated 2 January, show a building almost completely razed to the ground. Unverified footage posted online of the aftermath of the blast also showed a huge building reduced to smoking rubble. • Several waves of Russian drones targeted critical infrastructure in Ukraine's capital Kyiv and surrounding areas early on Monday morning. Debris from a destroyed drone hit Kyiv's northeastern Desnianskiy district, wounding a 19-year-old man who was later taken to hospital, the city's mayor, Vitali Klitschko, said. Energy infrastructure facilities in the city were damaged, causing power and heating outages. • Ukraine claims to have destroyed 40 Russian drones heading for Kyiv on Sunday night, with 15 destroyed over neighbouring regions, three in the Kyiv region and 22 directly over the capital. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said the country's forces have shot down more than 80 drones since the start of 2023. • Russia is planning a protracted campaign of attacks with Iranian drones to "exhaust" Ukraine, President Volodymyr Zelenskiy warned in his Monday night address. "It is probably banking on exhaustion. Exhausting our people, our anti-aircraft defences, our energy." Ukraine, he said, had to "act and do everything so that the terrorists' fail in their aim, as all their others have failed." • Zelenskiy said he expects the first tranche of EU macro-financial aid to arrive in January after speaking to European Commission head Ursula von der Leyen on Monday. Zelenskiy thanked Von der Leyen for her support, adding the €18bn (\$19bn) worth of

	<p>financial assistance “is extremely important right now, when Russia is trying to gather new forces for aggression”.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukraine and the European Union will hold a summit in Kyiv on 3 February to discuss financial and military support, Zelenskiy’s office said in a statement on Monday. “The parties discussed expected results of the next Ukraine-EU summit to be held on 3 February in Kyiv and agreed to intensify preparatory work,” the statement read.
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HEADLINE	01/01 Day 312 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/01/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-31-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said on Saturday that his only wish for Ukrainians for 2023 was victory and he resolved to stay the course. “I want to wish all of us one thing – victory,” he said in a video message shortly before midnight as Ukrainians marked their first new year since the invasion. Zelenskiy reiterated that he would stay with his people while they were fighting for freedom. “We were told to surrender. We chose a counterattack,” he said. “We are ready to fight for it [freedom]. That’s why each of us is here. I’m here, we are here, you are here, everyone is here. We are all Ukraine.” • Russia has claimed its strikes against Ukraine on New Year’s Eve that killed three people were targeting its neighbour’s drone production. A children’s hospital was among the buildings said to have been hit by Russian shelling. Ukrainian officials claim Russia is deliberately targeting civilians to sow fear. • Russian leaders issued a series of defiant messages ahead of new year. President Vladimir Putin said Russia would “never give in” to the west, and was fighting for its “motherland, truth and justice ... so that Russia’s security can be guaranteed”. It was his longest new year’s address in his two decades in charge. • Russia launched more than 20 cruise missiles at Ukrainian targets on Saturday, killing at least one person in Kyiv, the capital, and injuring another 20 people in what one Ukrainian official described as “terror on New Year’s Eve”. Fourteen of the injured were taken to hospital and at least one was in critical condition after Moscow’s second major missile attack in three days. • Ukrainian air defence forces destroyed 45 Iranian-made unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), including 32 during attacks on Kyiv as its citizens attempted to welcome in the new year, Ukrainian command said. • Ukraine’s defence minister, Oleksii Reznikov, said Russia may be preparing a new mobilisation order and could close its border to men eligible to fight within a week. • Russia and Ukraine have exchanged more than 200 captured soldiers, the latest prisoner swap between the two sides. • The US is concerned by China’s alignment with Russia as Moscow continues its invasion of Ukraine, the US said after the presidents of Russia and China, Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping, held a video meeting on Friday. • Russian authorities have announced that soldiers and state employees deployed in Ukraine will be exempt from income tax, in the latest effort to encourage support for its military operation there.
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HEADLINE	01/03 Ukraine digitized its fighting forces
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-has-digitized-its-fighting-forces-on-a-shoestring-11672741405?mod=hp_lead_pos6
GIST	<p>Ukraine has achieved a cut-price version of what the Pentagon has spent decades and billions of dollars striving to accomplish: digitally networked fighters, intelligence and weapons.</p> <p>Kyiv’s improvised web of drones, fighters and weapons, linked through satellite communications and custom software, is giving its soldiers a level of intelligence, coordination and accuracy that has allowed</p>

the initially outnumbered and outgunned forces to run circles around [Russia's massive but lumbering armies](#).

Ukraine's grab bag of systems, built largely around off-the-shelf equipment, remain a far cry from the U.S. military's sprawling and hugely ambitious digitization effort, which has evolved and expanded with technological advances and carries names such as [network-centric warfare](#). The Defense Department aims for network scale, security and bandwidth that far exceed Ukraine's ambitions.

Still, say veterans of U.S. and allied digitization projects, Ukraine's success cobbling together a virtual command-and-control system on the fly offers valuable lessons for the West, particularly about the need to experiment and include nonmilitary experts.

"The lesson is you've got to innovate, and we don't," said Glen Grant, a retired British lieutenant colonel experienced in military digitization who has worked with U.S. forces and Ukraine since 2014 on defense reform. Bureaucratic Western militaries are "too slow and too heavy" to apply new technical solutions to battlefield problems quickly, he said.

[Ukraine's tech-savvy population has updated guerilla-war techniques](#) for a digital age.

Insurgencies have always repurposed tools at hand into weapons—from bamboo spikes to Molotov cocktails. In Ukraine, home to a thriving tech-outsourcing industry and hackers who operate outside the law, the motivated people are often software engineers who connect using digital services like encrypted messenger Signal and networks from companies like [Elon Musk's](#) SpaceX. And their tools have become mobile apps, 3-D printers and consumer drones.

"The enemy has been preparing for full-fledged [technology] war for 20 years. We made a technological leap in 10 months" Ukrainian Minister of Digital Transformation Mykhailo Fedorov [said on Twitter last week](#).

Units are modifying off-the-shelf drones with slings they can release remotely to drop grenades on enemy positions. Volunteer soldiers are using their private-sector experience developing enterprise resource-management software for multinationals to automate payroll on the front lines. One Ukrainian company is building remote-controlled electric vehicles that can be mounted with heavy machine guns or other cargo.

And Ukrainian programmers have updated a system the military calls Delta to give local commanders real-time battlefield intelligence received from drones and from spotters living in Russian-occupied parts of Ukraine.

"It's called connected war, and the Ukrainian army will be the most advanced ever because of life experience," said Roman Perimov, who is leading a new military technology development unit within a brigade of the Ukrainian army. His team is building homemade drone-jamming equipment and churns out cheap, high-capacity battery units to keep soldiers online during the fighting.

"You can have 500 drones in the sky for a relatively standard military action," he said. "This has never been seen before."

Cheap drones and [drone defense](#) represent one of the biggest innovation areas to emerge in this war. Both Ukrainian and Russian units typically use modified versions of small commercial drones for reconnaissance and attacks.

Ukrainian soldiers have been using 3-D printers to build compact plastic harnesses that snap onto popular commercial drones so that they can be armed with grenades, Mr. Perimov said. The harnesses have inexpensive light sensors attached to a mechanical clasp. When the operator tells the drone to flash lights on its belly, the sensors pick up the light, triggering the clasp to release a strap holding a grenade. Total cost for a 3-D-printed harness is about \$10 to \$15, Mr. Perimov said.

“It doesn’t do a lot of damage, but it could destroy a vehicle or a couple of troopers,” said Mr. Perimov, whose unit is now exploring the use of stratospheric commercial balloons that could perform reconnaissance or relay communications over swaths of the battlefield.

One element of Ukraine’s success in innovation is how different military units and Ukrainian tech companies are working on their own new military technologies—a bottom-up approach that at times more closely resembles a string of Silicon Valley garages than a Pentagon-funded project.

“We can’t even write a contract fast enough,” says Brad Halsey, an engineer and former U.S. special operations officer who now trains U.S. soldiers in what he calls “MacGyver-ing” to address immediate needs, who notes it can take the Pentagon a year to complete an acquisition. In Iraq, he ran a techie workspace to improvise tools for soldiers, such as probes to inspect innocent-looking objects for hidden explosive devices. “Our new mantra should be ‘how to be Ukrainian,’” Mr. Halsey said.

One effort involving armed, remote-control electric ground vehicles stems from a Ukrainian military contractor that also is working on remote-controlled machine guns. The company has been demonstrating the technology in recent months, but its founder declined to comment.

One resource-management software project started in a military unit that was looking to make payroll easier after onboarding so many new soldiers. Programmers who once built such systems for private companies as part of Ukraine’s sprawling technology-outsourcing sector turned to building an open-source system for automating payroll calculations. Now they are building other modules to the software to cover things such as equipment storage, according to people involved in the project.

Ukraine has had some centralized innovation, too. Its Defense Ministry and security services dusted off a battlefield-awareness platform that they had built to North Atlantic Treaty Organization standards but largely abandoned, said Yaroslav Honchar, a co-founder of Aerorozvidka, a nongovernmental organization that has been helping the Ukrainian army with surveillance drones since 2014. Ukraine used the system to consolidate information from drones and satellites as well as on chatbots with names such as “STOP Russian war” through which Ukrainians could send tips.

Almost every unit that participated in the battle for Kyiv last spring used Delta, which units can access by laptop or tablet, Mr. Honchar said. “Those who are under shelling are the best learners,” he added.

The result is a cut-price, improvised approximation of vast efforts that the Defense Department and other Western militaries have been working on for years, a secure digital matrix linking commanders, fighters, weapons and intelligence, say Western defense specialists familiar with Ukraine’s systems. U.S. ambitions for networked warfare have sprawled to cover a panoply of services, weapons systems and intelligence agencies while also trying to keep pace with tech advances.

One important ingredient for Ukraine’s military technology has been the decision by SpaceX to provide thousands of Starlink connection terminals early in the war, Ukrainian soldiers and commanders say. Most units have one, sometimes camouflaged in cardboard or garbage to avoid being spotted by enemy drones.

The U.S. is trying to adopt new technologies more quickly, including through a network of nongovernmental innovation hubs that are linked to the Pentagon but outside its bureaucracy, under the umbrella Defensewerx. They tap civilian know-how for military purposes and encourage brainstorming.

Now, those hubs—and particularly Sofwerx, tied to U.S. Special Operations Command—will be studying Ukraine’s example, say people familiar with their work.

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SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/sports/nhl/kraken/t-mobile-park-host-2024-nhl-winter-classic-between-kraken-golden-knights/281-4552f7a9-3590-402d-9891-7801264821ff
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — The National Hockey League's (NHL) annual New Year's Day outdoor game will officially be coming to Seattle in 2024.</p> <p>T-Mobile Park will be the site of the 2024 NHL Winter Classic, which will feature the Kraken taking on the Vegas Golden Knights.</p> <p>Seattle and Vegas are the two newest franchises to the NHL, and the 2024 edition will mark the 16th anniversary of the first Winter Classic back in 2008 at Ralph Wilson Stadium in Buffalo, N.Y.</p> <p>“We are honored that the NHL has selected the Kraken, in just our second season, to host this amazing event at the home of our friends, the Mariners,” said Tod Leiweke, CEO of the Kraken. “Over 40,000 fans will witness the beauty and grace of our wonderful game in a venue that showcases the Puget Sound surrounded by the Cascade and Olympic Mountains.”</p> <p>It adds another banner event to T-Mobile Park's schedule over the next year, as the Mariners also will host the 2023 MLB All-Star Week in Seattle in July.</p> <p>“It’s a tremendous honor to host the next NHL Winter Classic at T-Mobile Park,” said Catie Griggs, Seattle Mariners president of business operations. “We are thrilled to have the opportunity to support our hometown team when they take the ice and see our ballpark packed to the rafters with our city’s incredible fans cheering them on.”</p> <p>Fans can sign up for information on tickets and other game information as it becomes available at this link.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/02 Lost luggage still clogs SEA airport
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/lost-luggage-still-clogs-sea-airport-travelers-turning-gps-trackers/KPJ7MUIN7JER3KEVA7HBSXFI5A/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Monday brought another very busy day to Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, where travelers are now in the return rush home after the holiday weekend.</p> <p>While flights are largely back to normal, the lost bag woes continue, with people still struggling to reunite with their luggage.</p> <p>Now some people are taking keeping their bags safe into their own hands by using GPS trackers.</p> <p>On the baggage claim floor, stacks of suitcases sit outside each airline’s office.</p> <p>“Apparently, it got lost in Dallas somewhere,” said Dawn Cladwell, who returned home to the Seattle area last week – without her bag. She was back at the airport on Monday after the airline called, saying they’d found it.</p> <p>But other people haven’t been as lucky.</p> <p>“It’s chaotic. You see a lot of frustrated people,” said Alec Martin, who was back at SEA for a second time on Monday to look for his bag.</p> <p>The problem is lingering from the Christmas weather chaos nationwide, plus the unprecedented Southwest Airlines cancelations.</p>

“I checked in on the 29th, they take my bag, and the bag goes away,” said Joe DeBell, another traveler. But then his connecting flight got canceled. “It has all my Christmas presents in it. That’s the worst part about it,” he said.

None of these travelers KIRO 7 spoke with at SEA on Monday used any sort of GPS tracker.

“That would be smart. Maybe that should be our plan from now on. We put snowboards, skis, all our coats into one bag,” said Andrew Host, who was worried he also lost his bag.

Valerie Szybala, who was flying from Chicago to Washington D.C. after an international trip, did use a GPS tracker – specifically, an Apple AirTag.

“First time ever (using one),” Szybala said. “Turns out it really was worth it. I’m so glad,” she said.

Her bag got lost, and she started tweeting about its journey. The saga went viral; the initial tweet got over 16 million views.

She tracked her bag to an apartment complex that had other empty suitcases abandoned outside, a McDonald’s and a shopping center.

“You feel very violated to know that people are lying to you and saying ‘we have your bag,’ and they don’t. And you can see it on the tracker, and it’s doing crazy stuff,” Szybala said.

In November, KIRO 7 investigated the worsening problem of bag thefts at SEA airport and tested out GPS trackers. Port of Seattle Detective Darin Beam says he recommends you use one.

“I think they’re fantastic,” Beam said. “I use them myself.”

Between the Apple AirTag, a Tile Pro, and the LandAirSea 54 GPS, the Apple AirTag came out on top – with the fewest glitches.

Szybala ended up getting her bag back from a courier.

“I think without the tracker and without a tweet thread going viral, I wouldn’t have my bag back today,” she said. “This end part of the process was a madhouse, and it needs to be fixed – it’s not acceptable,” Szybala said.

She said in the future, she would have had the airline hold the bag at the airport instead of choosing the delivery option.

Even without a tracker, some of the people we spoke with at SEA still left with smiles.

“My Christmas gifts have arrived. We’re good to go – a success story!” DeBell said.

About Szybala’s case, United Airlines said in a statement, “The service our baggage delivery vendor provided does not meet our standards, and we are investigating what happened to lead to this service failure.”

Seattle-based Alaska Airlines said in the wake of the winter storms, “Our Alaska team worked hard to reunite guests with their bags, and we are pleased to say that we’ve returned 10,000 bags to their owners. We are fully staffed in Seattle, and last week we augmented with additional management staff to get through all the baggage returns.”

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SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/seattle-firefighters-douse-blaze-at-encampment-in-south-lake-union-homeless-tents-fire-police-washington-roads-roy-street-flame-monday-king-county-homelessness#
GIST	<p>SEATTLE, Wash. — Seattle firefighters responded to a large fire at a homeless encampment in South Lake Union Monday afternoon.</p> <p>The fire started near 9th and Roy Street around noon. When firefighters arrived, multiple tents and wooden structures were found on fire.</p> <p>Fire crews were able to douse the fire within 30 minutes. Roads were closed in the area while fire crews and police responded.</p> <p>"I lost everything I own," said Corey, a man who lived in the encampment. "I lost it all, I don't even like looking at it. Everybody just wants to drive by and take pictures, but it's somebody's life here."</p> <p>According to Seattle's 911 data, 935 encampment fires were reported in 2022, an average of 78 per month. The city began tracking encampment fires in mid-2021 when they found fire crews were responding to approximately 107 fires each month.</p> <p>"People are no longer shocked by this, it's become so normal that now everybody is used to this and they think it's normal to live like this. It's not normal at all. We have to fight back, clean it up, and prevent it from happening," said John Marino, who lives near the encampment.</p> <p>Marino said the encampment is only one problem in the area, along with graffiti and rampant theft. He expressed disappointment that the city left the burned remains of the camp on the sidewalk.</p> <p>"I think the city needs to really take accountability. They need to be responsible and clean this up immediately. We live here and we're concerned. By allowing this to continue, it's getting progressively worse," Marino told KOMO News.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/02 Free 'identicard' program for homeless
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/identicard-program-homelessness-people-identity-help-reach-barriers-new-year-washington-homeless-identify-sheltered-unsheltered-department-of-licensing-seattle-tent-housed#
GIST	<p>SEATTLE, Wash. — A free Identification card program for people experiencing homelessness in Washington state is now law. The new measure took effect with the start of the new year on Jan. 1, 2023.</p> <p>Individuals who reside in our state, are considered sheltered or unsheltered persons, and do not have a valid driver's license can be issued a no-cost identification card by the Washington Department of Licensing (DOL).</p> <p>The program is designed to help remove barriers for people experiencing homelessness.</p> <p>The Public Defender Association (PDA), a local outreach organization that works with homeless people within the legal system, insists getting identification for those experiencing homelessness is often the first step in helping someone go from being in a tent to being housed.</p> <p>"That is our key, key factor into getting someone into housing," said Nichole Alexander, PDA Director of Special Initiatives and Outreach, "Everything we need to get you into housing, we need identification."</p> <p>She pointed to a longtime problematic encampment that once wrapped around the corner at Pike and 4th in downtown Seattle. Last February, Alexander and other outreach workers helped transition several people living in tents on the sidewalks into temporary housing. She insisted building relationships with those clients over six weeks, gaining their trust, and identifying their needs made the difference.</p>

Those who agreed to take help were moved inside and connected with wrap-around services, but Alexander said the majority of them were without identification. The process of helping them began with securing a state identicard at \$72 each.

One of those clients who accepted help was a mom whose family was taking care of children.

"I just got to deliver Christmas gifts to a mom and her kids... that was a huge success story she just got housed three weeks ago, just in time for Christmas a lot of that had to do with getting identification," said Alexander.

Alexander said the [Public Defender Association](#) insists its important for DOL staff to be trained to work with a trauma informed way with people who don't have conventional identity documents.

"We hope the DOL has trained around when our folks come in a trauma-informed way we are interacting with our folks," Alexander said.

The DOL is closed for the holiday and not available for comment today, but added its outreach team did similar work providing IDs for those experiencing homelessness at an encampment last fall.

In an email, a DOL spokesperson said the new measure does not require training for licensing service representatives but added their staff work manuals are updated, as they are with any other bills that went into effect this year.

The identification card is known as the identicard and a result of the [passage of Senate Bill 5815](#). The measure's summary report says:

Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the Department of Commerce, working in conjunction with DOL, must create and implement an identicard program to provide homeless individuals within Washington State a stateissued identicard. Under the program, a homeless individual is eligible for a one-time, taxpayer-funded original or renewal identicard.

An identicard is distinctly designed so it is not confused with an official driver license, and it generally expires on the eighth anniversary of the applicant's birth date after issuance.

The program is expected to help at least 15,000 people.

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HEADLINE	01/03 US troops train in Romania close to Russia
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/03/world/europe/us-troops-romania-russia-ukraine-war.html
GIST	<p>MIHAIL KOGALNICEANU AIR BASE, Romania — The soldiers of the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division train, eat and sleep on a drab, sprawling post in southeast Romania, a mere seven-minute rocket flight from where Russia has stockpiled munitions in Crimea.</p> <p>Farther north, in military exercises with Romanian troops just a few miles from the Ukrainian border, U.S. soldiers, also from the 101st division, are firing artillery, launching helicopter assaults and digging trenches similar to those on the front lines in the region near Kherson, the Ukrainian port city from which Russian troops retreated in November.</p> <p>It is the first time the 101st Airborne Division has been deployed to Europe since World War II, and with their presence in Romania, a member of NATO, its soldiers are now closer to the war in Ukraine than any other U.S. Army unit.</p> <p>Its mission is considered a model for an American military that has newly stepped back from two decades of actively fighting wars and into an era of trying to deter adversaries — using a show of force as well as training, weapons shipments and other aid to drive home the point.</p>

“This is a regional conflict, but it has global implications,” the U.S. Army’s chief of staff, Gen. James C. McConville, said in a mid-December interview at the air base, which shares a runway with an adjoining commercial airport named for the former Romanian prime minister, Mihail Kogalniceanu, near the Black Sea.

The troop deployment in Romania is meant as a warning to Moscow, part of President Biden’s pledge to defend “every single inch” of NATO territory without tempting President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia into escalating. But holding joint exercises is also a way of ensuring that allies in southeast Europe are ready to hold the line.

It is unclear what kind of footprint the United States will keep at the base; the Pentagon will soon decide whether to maintain the number of American troops and senior commanders there.

Some in Congress are wary of the cost of meeting Ukraine’s continuing demands for support — with the top House Republican, Representative Kevin McCarthy of California, suggesting in October that his party might be unwilling to write a “blank check” to Ukraine.

But supporters of maintaining a strong presence in Eastern Europe pointed to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February as proof that the United States and its NATO allies did not do enough to deter Moscow last winter.

“This is one of the most important lessons that we have to take away from Ukraine,” Representative Seth Moulton, Democrat of Massachusetts, told reporters after returning from a brief trip to Ukraine in early December. “When we look at the other scenario that might unfold like Ukraine, in the Pacific with China and Taiwan, we have to ensure that deterrence is successful.”

Military planners echoed that strategy, noting that the 101st Airborne Division was also using the Black Sea for coastal defense training — a useful skill should China ever become more aggressive and invade Taiwan, a self-governing island that Beijing has long claimed as its own.

The division was ordered to deploy about 4,000 soldiers and senior commanders just weeks after Russia invaded. They arrived at the air base, near the Romanian coastal city of Constanta, over the summer. The base previously served as a sleepy outpost for training NATO troops, including several hundred American soldiers, and was known more broadly in the military as a way station with a small mess hall for U.S. forces heading to and from Afghanistan.

The mission here is somewhat different from those elsewhere in Europe, where some U.S. troops are training Ukrainian forces on advanced weapons systems that are being shipped to the Ukrainians. The division’s commander, Maj. Gen. J.P. McGee, said that training with other Eastern European soldiers had its own value.

“You get a chance to train and operate on the very ground that you might have to defend,” General McGee said.

He added: “You have to work with a NATO ally, and it’s almost unimaginable in the future that we would ever go fight without allies.”

In addition to the troops in Romania, General McGee has also sent smaller teams of soldiers to train with NATO allies in Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary and Slovakia. The unit prides itself on being the closest one to the combat, but it is by no means the largest: Officials said that an estimated 12,000 troops attached to the Army’s First Infantry Division, added after the invasion, are based mostly in western Poland and the Baltics.

Together, they represent a [buildup of U.S. forces in Europe](#) since Russia invaded Ukraine, as [Mr. Biden promised allies](#) at a NATO summit meeting in Madrid in June.

As part of military exercises with American and British forces, Romanian troops have been testing the HIMARS rocket launching systems — the same weapons that have helped Ukraine push Russian forces into retreat — against simulated targets in the Black Sea over the past few months. [Romania bought three of the rocket systems](#) years ago, and officials said they are still in the process of being delivered.

Lt. Gen. Iulian Berdila, chief of the Romanian land forces — who has welcomed the deployment — said regional officials had been warning the West of “incremental and toxic” advances by Russia since it seized control of Crimea from Ukraine in a 2014 local referendum that much of the world views as illegal.

“We’ve been very attentive to what Russia does, and what are the consequences,” General Berdila said. Of the training with U.S. troops, he said, “We’ve war-gamed together the different scenarios and are prepared to synchronize plans as we speak.”

The number and senior command level of American forces currently in Romania are enough, he said, for “predictable deterrence and defense together.”

General McConville would not predict what the Biden administration might do in Romania, but broadly speaking, he said the troops at the air base had “really made a difference, and I think we will continue to provide those capabilities as required.”

Having a division commander and staff so close to the border with Ukraine is more than symbolic, said Becca Wasser, a war analyst at the Center for a New American Security, a research institute in Washington. It allows for quick decisions about where to position thousands of troops and weapons should Russia push the war into NATO territory.

“What you are seeing is indicative of a change in how the U.S. military is approaching posture and deployments around the globe as the era of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have changed,” Ms. Wasser said. “It’s not necessarily going to be this combat deployment — what you really have is a deterrence deployment.”

It is the same kind of mission, Ms. Wasser said, that was undertaken by tens of thousands of American troops sent to bases across the U.S. Central Command in 2020 as tensions with Iran flared across the Middle East.

For Command Sgt. Maj. Vitalia Sanders, who leads a battalion at Mihail Kogalniceanu air base, the mission is as personal as it is professional.

She was born in a town outside Uzhhorod, in western Ukraine, and moved to northwest Indiana when she was 12 to live with her grandmother. She was last in Ukraine in 2005, and her brother is still there — although their communications over WhatsApp and Facebook have been limited because Russian strikes have taken out power grids.

Sergeant Major Sanders has been in the U.S. Army for 21 years, and served in Afghanistan and Kuwait. But she never forgot the threat that Russia posed to Ukraine.

“Just being here, so close to home,” she said, “makes me hungry and makes me fight, and hopefully spreads that energy to soldiers to let them know how important this is for everybody.”

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HEADLINE	01/02 Deadly strike: Moscow military failings
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/02/world/europe/ukraine-russia-himars-makiivka.html
GIST	In one of their deadliest attacks yet on Russian forces, Ukrainians used American-made rockets to kill dozens — and perhaps hundreds — of Moscow’s troops in a New Year’s Day strike behind the lines, prompting outraged Russian war hawks to accuse their military of lethal incompetence.

The strike by the HIMARS rockets killed 63 Russian soldiers in a building housing them in the occupied city of Makiivka, in eastern Ukraine, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Monday — an unusual admission for a military that has often refused to acknowledge serious losses. A former Russian paramilitary commander in Ukraine, Igor Girkin, [wrote on the Telegram](#) app that “many hundreds” were dead and wounded and that many “remained under the rubble.”

Ukrainian military officials said it appeared that “about 400” Russian troops had been killed, though they did not explicitly say that Kyiv was behind the attack.

None of the claims could be independently verified, but even the lowest number would represent one of the worst Russian losses in a single episode in the war, and an embarrassment for President Vladimir V. Putin. He has vowed repeatedly to correct the glaring errors and weaknesses in his armed forces that the war has exposed, and in a [New Year’s Eve speech](#) filmed at a military base, Mr. Putin told the families of soldiers killed in the fighting, “I share your pain with all my heart.”

Pro-war Russian bloggers and some government officials said the debacle was caused by the military’s own repeated and costly mistakes, like garrisoning troops in a dense concentration within range of Ukrainian artillery, placing them in the same building as an ammunition depot, and allowing them to use cellphones, whose signals the Ukrainians can use to zero in on their target.

“Our generals are untrainable in principle,” wrote Mr. Girkin, who has used the nom de guerre Igor Strelkov.

Some pro-war lawmakers demanded an investigation, and one of them, Sergei Mironov, leader of a pro-Kremlin party in the Parliament, called for the prosecution of all officials responsible, “whether they wear epaulets or not.”

“Obviously neither intelligence nor counterintelligence or air defense worked properly,” he said.

The attack was “a massive blow,” said a spokesman for the Russian-installed proxy government in the Donetsk region, Daniil Bezsonov. “The enemy inflicted the most serious defeats in this war on us not because of their coolness and talent, but because of our mistakes,” he wrote in [a Telegram post](#).

More than 10 months after an invasion that Russians — and many Ukrainians — thought would produce a quick Russian victory, each side has suffered more than 100,000 killed and wounded, by Western estimates, and the war has become one of attrition, with no evidence of an end in sight.

Some of the heaviest recent fighting has ravaged the Donetsk region, one of four the Kremlin claimed to annex in September even as its troops were losing ground there, giving up towns they had seized earlier in the war. Since then combat in the region has slowed to a bloody slog, as the Ukrainians look for places to press their advantage, while Russians build trenches and fortifications along the front lines and try to capture the city of Bakhmut.

On Monday, Russia launched a flurry of Iranian-made exploding drones at Ukraine, continuing its barrage against cities and civilian infrastructure, especially the power grid. But it appeared that Ukraine’s increasingly effective air defenses once again minimized the damage.

The Ukrainian [military said](#) on Monday that 22 drones were shot down over Kyiv in the early-morning hours, but at least two loud explosions were heard in the city. Mayor Vitali Klitschko said some energy infrastructure facilities had been damaged, affecting systems that heat buildings. It was not clear if the explosions were caused by drones that evaded air defenses, by drones that were shot down but detonated on hitting the ground, or by air defense missiles.

The Ukraine military said it had shot down all 45 Iranian Shahed drones launched over the weekend, though some cruise missiles penetrated its defenses.

In [his nightly video address](#), President Volodymyr Zelensky warned on Monday, “We have information that Russia is planning a prolonged attack with Shaheds,” aiming to exhaust Ukraine’s defenses and its ability to endure. He said, “Now is the time when everyone involved in the protection of the sky should be especially attentive.”

The deadly attack on Russian forces in Makiivka used the HIMARS rocket artillery to hit a vocational school where troops were housed, Moscow said. The Russian Defense Ministry said that four HIMARS rockets had hit the building, and that two others had been shot down by Russian air defenses.

As pro-war bloggers and officials reacted with fury, video posted on social media showed firefighters amid the ruins of the structure, reduced to smoking piles of rubble. The bloggers have become influential opinion-makers in Russia amid the censorship of mainstream media.

Mr. Girkin, the blogger and former paramilitary commander, wrote that the vocational school in Makiivka had been “almost completely destroyed” because “ammunition stored in the same building” detonated in the strike. The ammunition was stored “without the slightest sign of disguise,” he wrote, adding that similar strikes had occurred earlier this year, albeit with fewer casualties.

Dara Massicot, a senior policy researcher at the RAND Corporation, noted that the Russian officials “do not typically provide this type of information after a major loss, which suggests they want to control the narrative on this event.”

Makiivka, adjacent to the city of Donetsk, lies only about 10 miles from the nearest Ukrainian-held territory, the town of Avdiivka to the northwest — well within the roughly 50-mile range of the HIMARS rockets the United States has sent to Ukraine. A U.S. military official declined to comment on the strike.

HIMARS, which fires satellite-guided rockets from mobile launchers, is part of a growing arsenal of sophisticated Western weapons that have helped Ukraine change the course of the conflict.

Since the Biden administration began supplying the weapons system in June, HIMARS has greatly increased the range and precision of the outgunned Ukrainians. They have used it to hit targets far behind the front lines, like [the main bridge](#) linking the city of Kherson to Russian-held territory, which contributed to the Russian decision to abandon the city.

Last month, a Ukrainian HIMARS attack [destroyed a hotel](#) in the city of Kadiivka, in the Luhansk region northeast of Donetsk. That attack killed members of Kremlin-aligned [Wagner paramilitary group](#) who were using the hotel as a base, according to Ukrainian authorities in the region.

The HIMARS system is most effective when used against stationary targets that can be identified in advance and pinpointed, such as ammunition dumps, infrastructure or troop concentrations. The United States has so far supplied Ukraine with at least 20 HIMARS systems, [which are made by Lockheed Martin](#).

Many soldiers who were casualties appeared to be new recruits, recently mobilized in Mr. Putin’s [drive to conscript more men](#) into the fighting in Ukraine. One report in Russian state media said that “active use of cellular phones by the newly arrived servicemen” had been a prime reason for the attack, helping Ukrainian forces to pinpoint their location.

Throughout the war, Russian soldiers in Ukraine have spoken on open cellphone lines, often revealing their positions and [exposing the disarray](#) in their ranks. Though the continued use of the phones, despite the devastating consequences, exposes a failing by the military command, military bloggers say this explanation shifts the blame onto the victims.

	<p>It does not address why Russian commanders housed so many conscripts in an unprotected building within reach of U.S.-made rockets.</p> <p>“No one is assuming the responsibility for the needless deaths,” one blogger, Anastasia Kashevarova, wrote on Telegram.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/03 Philippines holiday flooding kills dozens
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/03/world/asia/philippines-floods-deaths.html
GIST	<p>Across the Philippines, the 2022 holiday season was meant to be a time for celebration and a relief after two Christmases tarnished by punishing coronavirus lockdowns. But on the southern Philippine island of Mindanao, families faced tragedy on Christmas Day when rains triggered flooding and landslides, killing at least 51 people and displacing thousands, the authorities said.</p> <p>The Philippines is a tropical archipelago that has been slammed over the years by countless Pacific typhoons and catastrophic floods. The capital, Manila, is particularly susceptible to the impacts of climate change. Yet the scope and timing of this year’s disaster, in a country that has Asia’s largest population of Roman Catholics, felt especially tragic and cruel.</p> <p>As of Tuesday afternoon, at least 19 people were still missing and thousands of others were living in emergency shelters on Mindanao. One victim identified so far was Laurence Grace Patarlas Rapols, 8, who the authorities said had been riding on her aunt’s motorcycle when floodwaters swept her away.</p> <p>Churches and charities across the Philippines have been appealing for relief funds and emergency supplies. President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has said that he plans to visit Mindanao after his previously scheduled trip to China ends on Thursday.</p> <p>One challenge for rescue workers is that the heavy rains mostly affected Northern Mindanao, an area that is less prepared for such disasters than other regions in the Philippines, said Alan Tanjusay, the country’s undersecretary for social welfare.</p> <p>Mr. Tanjusay said many people in Northern Mindanao had spent their Christmas and New Year celebrations eating donated food, and that the mood there was somber.</p> <p>“Imagine losing your home” on Christmas Day, he said.</p> <p>Floodwaters have been subsiding, but more bad weather may be on the way. Forecasters said on Tuesday that they expected more heavy rains, and possible flooding, through at least Wednesday morning on several islands, including Mindanao.</p> <p>This is the second straight year that extreme weather has caused death and destruction over the holidays in the Philippines. In December 2021, Super Typhoon Rai came ashore in Bohol Province with the same intensity as that of a Category 5 hurricane, killing hundreds of people and forcing millions of others from their homes.</p> <p>Linking a single flood to climate change requires extensive scientific analysis. But climate change, which is already causing heavier rainfall in many storms, is an increasingly important part of the mix. One reason is that warmer atmosphere holds and releases more water.</p> <p>Climate change can also magnify the effects of bad city planning. In Manila, excessive groundwater pumping has caused the land to sag even as sea levels rise, heightening the risk of future flooding.</p> <p>It would be hard to overstate the importance of Christmas in the Philippines. In a country of 111 million people that has about as many Catholics as the United States, Roman Catholicism has long been a pillar of identity and a force in national politics in the Philippines. And because millions of Filipinos work abroad, Christmas is often the only time of the year that entire families gather in person.</p>

	This year, the sense of holiday suffering was compounded by a New Year's Day power outage at the international airport in Manila that caused chaos and stranded tens of thousands of passengers.
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HEADLINE	01/03 Ice storms, heavy snowfall, tornadoes
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/03/us/ice-storms-heavy-snowfall-tornadoes-threaten-midwest-and-south.html
GIST	<p>MCKINNEY, Texas — A pounding stretch of rain, wind and snow that cut a path of destruction through California pushed east toward Midwestern and Southern states overnight, threatening ice storms in Minnesota and tornadoes in Texas.</p> <p>A so-called “multi-hazard storm” threatened to cover parts of the country in a wintry mix beginning Monday night from the central and Northern Plains to the Western Great Lakes, while also fueling thunderstorms, tornadoes and periods of hail across parts of the South.</p> <p>The severe weather could affect travel as many people return from the New Year holiday break, and cause widespread power outages.</p> <p>The storms formed from the same “atmospheric river” system that drowned California over the weekend, causing record rainfall and flooding in the bay area, before dropping four feet of snow on Utah and almost a foot of snow in parts of Arizona. California is still recovering from the mess left over New Year’s weekend, even as forecasters warn another, possibly larger storm is expected to hit the northern part of the state again on Wednesday.</p> <p>Approximately 35 million people could be impacted by severe thunderstorms through Tuesday, said Bill Bunting, the chief of forecast operations for the National Weather Service Storm Prediction Center. Heavy rain in the South could also cause flash flooding.</p> <p>People in risk areas should “ensure that they have their severe weather plan in place, including having multiple ways to receive warnings and also an identified safe area in the home, at work, or other locations to seek shelter should a severe storm approach,” Mr. Bunting said.</p> <p>The highest snowfall could total over 18 inches in the northernmost parts of the Midwest, including Minnesota, according to a National Weather Service online forecast discussion, and into Tuesday morning snow could reach a rate of one to three inches per hour.</p> <p>Dozens of counties in Minnesota were also under ice storm warning, where up to half an inch of ice could accumulate on the ground and wind gusts of up to 40 miles per hour could make travel “nearly impossible,” according to the National Weather Service.</p> <p>At least five airlines, including American, Jet Blue and Delta, already began announcing travel waivers for people planning to fly through Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport or the upper Midwest through midweek. Some airlines offered to waive change or cancellation fees.</p> <p>In Colorado Monday morning, the National Weather Service attributed delayed and canceled flights in Denver to a unique situation: a limited quarter-mile of visibility for pilots because of a freezing fog.</p> <p>The potential cancellations and delays come just more than a week after a wave of flight cancellations and delays caused seeming anarchy in airports because of winter weather, staff shortages and, in the case of Southwest Airlines, an unusual operations system and technology problems.</p> <p>In the states forecast to be hit by freezing rain, including Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, even mere driving could be dangerous. Icy precipitation could result in downed tree branches</p>

	<p>and power lines, according to the National Weather Service, and gusts of wind could create “areas of blowing or drifting snow” throughout the day, with little to no visibility.</p> <p>Despite spreading across a large part of the country, Mr. Bunting said the storm was typical of those seen during winter, with wintry conditions in the upper Midwest and severe thunderstorms in the South.</p> <p>“The magnitude and nature of the impacts vary from storm to storm, but this overall structure is similar to past storms,” he said.</p> <p>As of Monday evening, portions of Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana and Kansas remained under tornado watch. In North Texas, outside Plano, the region was at risk for severe thunderstorms early Monday, and the region to the East was under a tornado watch. Lingering Christmas lights stirred in the wind, and dark gray clouds hung over the plains.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/03 US: former Marine trained Chinese pilots
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/jan/03/former-us-marine-held-in-australia-received-more-than-100000-to-train-chinese-pilots-indictment-alleges
GIST	<p>The US government has accused the former marine pilot Daniel Duggan of receiving more than \$100,000 to teach Chinese aviators how to land on aircraft carriers.</p> <p>An unsealed indictment, filed in the US District of Columbia, alleges the naturalised Australian received 12 payments of either \$9,900 or \$9,500, with receipts often citing “personal development training”.</p> <p>It says the payments were made by an unnamed China-based business that, according to the US government, “acquired military equipment and technical data for the PRC government and military”.</p> <p>New details in the indictment allege Duggan, 54, negotiated the terms of his service and wrote in a September 2012 email, while in China, that “he hoped his children would be set for life as a result”.</p> <p>Duggan is accused of providing military training to Chinese pilots at a test flying academy in South Africa that required teachers to have “knowledge and experience in naval aviation meeting Nato standards”.</p> <p>The unsealed indictment also alleges Duggan negotiated directly with a Chinese national to provide additional services to a state-owned entity.</p> <p>“These services included the evaluation of military pilot trainees, testing of naval aviation-related equipment, and instructions on tactics, techniques and procedures associated with launching from and landing on a naval aircraft carrier,” the indictment said.</p> <p>“Neither Duggan nor any of his coconspirators applied for a license from the United States government to provide defence services to any foreign nationals.”</p> <p>Duggan faces four charges, including conspiracy to defraud the United States by conspiracy to unlawfully export defense services to China, conspiracy to launder money, and two counts of violating the arms export control act and international traffic in arms regulations.</p> <p>Duggan was arrested by Australian federal police in a regional New South Wales town on 21 October, at the request of the FBI.</p> <p>In December, the Australian government approved a request to extradite Duggan to the US to face charges.</p> <p>Duggan’s lawyer, Dennis Miralis, has previously said the 54-year-old pilot will fight any extradition request, and resolutely maintains his innocence.</p>

“He denies having breached any US law, any Australian law, any international law,” Miralis said in December.

US authorities believe Duggan, also known by the names Ding San Xing, Din San Qing, DSQ or Ivan, provided “aviation services in China”.

The document reveals the US State Department emailed Duggan as early as 2008 to tell him he needed to apply for written authorisation to provide training to a foreign air force.

In December 2010, US authorities allege the owner of the China-based business stated Duggan would be giving a presentation titled Personal Development Training: The Fighter Pilot’s Guide to Mission Success. Weeks later, he is alleged to have received a payment of \$9,500.

In March 2011, Duggan is accused of drafting “a multi-page assessment that reviewed aspects of the PRC’s aircraft carrier training program and proposed carrier aviation training-related services”. Another payment followed a month later.

The indictment alleges Duggan and another eight unnamed co-conspirators were involved in providing military services to Chinese pilots, including a former US Navy officer.

It also alleges some of the group used false information to acquire a T-2 Buckeye from the US to be used for training in South Africa.

Duggan and his co-conspirators are accused of seeking to defraud the US government by “deceit, craft, trickery and dishonest means”.

Donald Rothwell, a professor of international law at the Australian National University, said the “wide sweep” of the indictment revealed a “detailed criminal investigation” by US authorities.

“Duggan was a US citizen until some point in time in 2012 when he acquired Australian citizenship and is therefore subject to the application of these US laws for conduct in China and South Africa during the time he was a US citizen,” Rothwell said.

Duggan’s arrest coincided with warnings from Australian and British authorities over the practice of former military pilots being offered lucrative contracts to train pilots in China.

Duggan’s wife, Saffrine Duggan, has previously described the charges as “politically motivated injustice”, arguing her husband is a “victim of the United States government’s political dispute with China”.

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HEADLINE	01/03 More kids sickened by pot-laced treats
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/health-children-marijuana-district-of-columbia-bf55c85be2c2720a4988e6ecedafdb95
GIST	<p>The number of young kids, especially toddlers, who accidentally ate marijuana-laced treats rose sharply over five years as pot became legal in more places in the U.S., according to a study published Tuesday.</p> <p>More than 7,000 confirmed cases of kids younger than 6 eating marijuana edibles were reported to the nation’s poison control centers between 2017 and 2021, climbing from about 200 to more than 3,000 per year.</p> <p>Nearly a quarter of the children wound up hospitalized, some seriously ill, according to a new analysis in the journal Pediatrics.</p>

And those are just the reported cases, said Dr. Marit Tweet, a medical toxicologist with the Southern Illinois School of Medicine, who led the study.

Cases of kids eating pot products such as candies, chocolate and cookies have coincided with more states allowing medical and recreational cannabis use. Currently, 37 U.S. states permit use of marijuana for medical purposes and 21 states regulate adult recreational use.

Tweet called for greater vigilance by parents and for more laws like those adopted by several states to make pot products — often packaged to look like kids' candies and snacks — less appealing and accessible to children.

"When it's in a candy form or cookies, people don't think of it in the same way as household chemicals or other things a child could get into," she said. "But people should really be thinking of it as a medication."

Tweet and her colleagues analyzed reports to the National Poison Data System, which includes the nation's 55 regional poison control centers. More than half of the children were toddlers, ages 2 and 3, the study showed. More than 90% got the edibles at home.

"They're the ones starting to explore and to get up and move around," she said.

Of more than 7,000 reports, researchers were able to track the outcomes of nearly 5,000 cases. They found that nearly 600 kids, or about 8%, were admitted to critical care units, most often with depressed breathing or even coma. Nearly 15% were admitted to non-critical care units and more than a third were seen in emergency rooms. Drowsiness, breathing problems, fast heart rate and vomiting were the most common symptoms.

The results are not surprising, said Dr. Brian Schultz, a pediatric emergency physician at Johns Hopkins Medicine in Baltimore. He previously worked at Children's National Hospital in Washington, D.C., where he and his colleagues treated kids who had eaten pot edibles "almost on a daily basis," he said.

Reports and hospitalizations rose during the last two years of the study, during the COVID-19 pandemic. More children were at home, with more opportunities to find pot treats, Tweet said. With marijuana more widely legal, parents may have felt less stigma seeking help from poison centers and health care providers, she added.

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HEADLINE	01/02 National park closes after migrants arrive
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/dry-tortugas-national-park-florida-keys-closes-after/story?id=96086063
GIST	<p>Dry Tortugas National Park announced it would close on Monday after multiple migrant landings throughout the region over the past couple days shut down operations at the park.</p> <p>A statement released by the park says it will "temporarily close to public access while law enforcement and medical personnel evaluate, provide care for and coordinate transport to Key West for approximately 300 migrants who arrived in the park over the past couple of days."</p> <p>A spokesperson for the U.S. Coast Guard would not confirm if the National Park's estimate of how many migrants arrived is accurate, but said the Homeland Security Task Force is currently rescuing several migrants from uninhabited islands in the park.</p> <p>"Homeland Security Task Force - Southeast is aware of multiple migrant landings this weekend on Dry Tortugas National Park and the Marquesas. The U.S. Coast Guard and partner federal, state and local components in HSTF-SE are coordinating efforts to recover the individuals currently stranded on the remote, uninhabited islands," Rear Adm. Brendan C. McPherson, commander of the Seventh Coast Guard District and director of Homeland Security Task Force, said in a statement.</p>

Dry Tortugas National Park is 70 miles west of Key West, Florida, and is a 100-square-mile park accessible only by boat or seaplane. It's made up of seven small islands.

The closure "is expected to last several days," a statement released by the park said.

"Like elsewhere in the Florida Keys, the park has recently seen an increase in people arriving by boat from Cuba and landing on the islands of Dry Tortugas National Park. Park first responders provide food, water and basic medical attention until the Department of Homeland Security arrives and takes the lead," the statement said.

Enid Magari said he was camping in Dry Tortugas National Park when he saw groups of migrants arriving on shore.

"I was camping at Dry Tortugas for New Years. When we arrived on Dec 31st there were ~80 migrants, by mid day Jan 1 there were close to 300 and we were informed we needed to leave the island. I witnessed 4 such landings myself..." Magari [tweeted](#).

One video Magari captured appears to show a row of vessels on the sand.

"The shouts of relief and tears of joy will stick with me for the rest of my life," Magari tweeted.

The migrants are being given food and first aid and will be first transferred to federal law enforcement agents in the Keys. Rear Adm. McPherson said.

"From there, they will be transported for processing by regional U.S. Border Patrol stations to determine their legal status to remain in the United States or be processed for removal and repatriation to their country of origin. Irregular, illegal maritime migration is always dangerous and very often deadly. Do not take to the seas," he said.

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HEADLINE	12/31 CDC: new omicron strain overtakes US
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/xbb15-subvariant-cdc-reports-new-omicron-strain-taking-rcna63512
GIST	<p>A new version of omicron has taken hold in the U.S., according to the most recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The subvariant of omicron, named XBB.1.5, has raised concerns about another potential wave of Covid cases following the busy holiday travel season.</p> <p>The CDC projected Friday that about 40% of confirmed U.S. Covid cases are caused by the XBB.1.5 strain, up from 20% a week ago. In the Northeast, about 75% of confirmed cases are reported to be XBB.1.5.</p> <p>It's not clear yet where this version of omicron came from, but it appears to be spreading quickly here. There's no indication it causes more severe illness than any other omicron virus, Dr. Barbara Mahon, director of CDC's Coronavirus and Other Respiratory Viruses Division, told NBC News.</p> <p>While overall Covid hospitalizations are rising around the country, areas such as the Northeast that have seen high levels of the new variant have not experienced a disproportionate increase in hospitalizations, Mahon said.</p> <p>"We're seeing hospitalizations have been notching up overall across the country," she said. "They don't appear to be notching up more in the areas that have more XBB.1.5."</p> <p>The seven-day average of daily Covid hospitalizations reached 42,140 on Friday, an increase of 4.2% from two weeks previously, according to an NBC News tally. The seven-day average of daily intensive care unit admissions has also risen to 5,125 per day, an increase of more than 9% from two weeks ago.</p>

There's a lot that's still unknown about the latest subvariant, including whether it's more contagious than [other forms of omicron](#), Mahon said.

Other scientists worry that XBB.1.5 is even better at getting around the antibodies we've built up from Covid vaccines and previous infection from the many different types of omicron that have spread since last December, including the original BA.1 and the more recent [BQ.1.1 and BQ.1 subvariants](#).

The XBB.1.5 is a relative of the [omicron XBB variant](#), which is a recombinant of the omicron BA.2.10.1 and BA.2.75 subvariants.

Combined, XBB and XBB.1.5 make up 44% of cases in the U.S., crowding out other versions of omicron. XBB has been found in at least 70 countries, according to the World Health Organization, and has caused surges of infection in some parts of Asia, including India and Singapore, in October.

Studies performed in the lab have found that XBB is capable of evading antibodies from previous Covid infections or vaccinations, meaning that being exposed to the virus would mean someone is more likely to get sick or reinfected and show symptoms.

"It's clear that there's immune evasive properties of XBB," said Dr. Isaach Bogoch, an infectious disease physician and epidemiologist at the University of Toronto. "That's been demonstrated both in laboratory studies and seen clinically in cases and hospitalizations."

Given the high level of population immunity in the U.S. — either through infection, vaccination or both — Bogoch and others hope that, even if cases start to rise significantly, there won't be a dramatic spike in hospitalizations or deaths as seen in previous waves.

Antibody studies don't tell the whole story. Other parts of the immune system can protect against the virus and the Covid vaccines should remain effective at preventing severe illness and death from the virus, evidence suggests.

"We might certainly have a wave, but it's just much less likely to be as deadly or overwhelming to a health care system compared to earlier waves before we had this degree of hybrid immunity," said Bogoch.

Do Covid vaccines work against XBB.1.5?

For encouraging signs, Rick Bright, an American immunologist and former director of Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority, or BARDA, pointed to Singapore's experience with XBB.

There was a surge of cases, but "we didn't see the corresponding major surges in hospitalizations and deaths," Bright said.

"We think it is because a larger population of people in Singapore have been vaccinated with latest vaccines and boosters," he said.

That could be a problem in the U.S., unfortunately.

People age 65 and older are the most vulnerable to any form of the Covid virus. Yet, only 37.5% of that age group has received the updated [omicron booster](#), according to the [most recent CDC data](#).

The most important thing experts agree is to get a booster shot with the [bivalent vaccines](#) to bolster your immune system against the newer subvariants.

"We aren't in 2020, but people still do need to take this seriously and protect themselves," said Mahon, adding that getting the updated Covid vaccine is especially important for those over the age of 65, a high-risk group that has seen [pretty low booster uptake recently](#).

	<p>A study published last week in the New England Journal of Medicine found that the new Covid boosters from Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech bolstered antibody responses to many subvariants of Omicron, including the XBB variant.</p> <p>While the new booster — called a bivalent because it targets the omicron strains BA.4 and BA.5 as well as the original coronavirus — is not perfect, it offers additional protection to that what was seen in the original or monovalent boosters previously available, said Mehul Suthar, an associate professor at the Emory Vaccine Center at Emory University and author of the report.</p> <p>“With the monovalent boosters your neutralizing antibodies are just not that potent against the variants, but the bivalent booster ensures it’s slightly better,” he said. “It’s not knock your socks off amazing, but it’s better, which says the bivalent boosters are working the way they should.”</p> <p>The new XBB.1.5 variant was not studied in the report, but Suthar predicts its immune evasive properties to be in a similar range as XBB. He expects the bivalent booster will bolster protection against the latest version as well.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/01 Northern Calif. historic deluge
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2023/01/01/san-francisco-flooding-rainfall-record/
GIST	<p>A powerful atmospheric river drenched Northern and Central California on New Year’s Eve, knocking out power to tens of thousands of customers, trapping people in flooded vehicles and prompting Sacramento County to warn some residents to evacuate ahead of “an imminent levee failure.”</p> <p>The storm unloaded copious amounts of lowland rain and mountain snow. San Francisco posted its second-wettest day in more than 170 years because of this fire hose of tropical moisture. It was the latest in a line of storm systems to affect the Golden State; at least two more are on the way in 2023’s opening week.</p> <p>Late Saturday, Sacramento County officials advised some residents of the town of Wilton to evacuate “due to an imminent levee failure in that area on the Cosumnes River. Residents have been advised to seek higher ground immediately.” The town will remain under a flash flood warning through Sunday evening, according to the National Weather Service.</p> <p>The Weather Service office in Sacramento tweeted a blunt warning Sunday for drivers on Highway 99 between the areas of Elk Grove and Galt: “DO NOT ATTEMPT TO DRIVE OVER FLOODED ROADWAYS — TURN AROUND, DON’T DROWN!”</p> <p>Flash flood warnings were also issued Sunday afternoon for southern Sacramento County as local waterways swelled. “It is expected that the flooding from the Cosumnes River and the Mokelumne River is moving southwest toward I-5 and could reach these areas in the middle of the night,” officials from the Sacramento County Office of Emergency Services tweeted.</p> <p>Dan Quiggle, deputy fire chief for operations for Cosumnes Community Service District Fire Department, told the Sacramento Bee newspaper that crews had rescued three dozen to four dozen people from Highway 99. Crews used boats and helicopters to ferry people away from “swirling floodwaters,” the newspaper reported.</p> <p>A reporter with KCRA, an NBC affiliate station, tweeted that local fire department crews searching along a highway found a submerged vehicle with a man inside who had died. Officials from the department weren’t immediately available when contacted for comment.</p>

KCRA also reported that more than 145,000 were without power on New Year's Eve. By 6 p.m. Eastern time Sunday, the Sacramento Municipal Utility District's outage map [showed that](#) 25,000 customers were still without power.

Local authorities reported two deaths Sunday, telling the [San Francisco Chronicle](#) that one person who had been in a vehicle that was washed off the road was rescued but later died and the other a body recovered from a vehicle "submerged in floodwaters."

Flood advisories blanketed the Bay Area on Saturday, with heavy rains [forcing the closure of Highway 101](#) in southern San Francisco for nearly eight hours. For a time, the highway [was submerged](#).

All told on Saturday, downtown San Francisco registered 5.46 inches of rain, marking its second-wettest day in records dating to 1849. December is the city's wettest month, with an average of 4.76 inches of rain. But the New Year's Eve deluge boosted December 2022's total to more than twice that: 11.7 inches.

The bad weather is due to a parade of [atmospheric rivers](#), or conveyor belt-like corridors of tropical moisture with origins as far away as Hawaii. Each reaches California through the same basic processes: Each filament of moisture is drawn eastward in between two oppositely spinning weather systems — a counterclockwise-rotating low to the north, with clockwise-spinning high pressure in the tropics to the south. The two systems work together like meshing gears, tugging ribbons of soupy tropical air toward the east.

Atmospheric rivers carry their heaviest moisture about a mile above the ground, which is why higher elevations, such as the Coastal Range and the Sierra Nevada, ordinarily end up with the jackpot precipitation totals. Saturday's setup was a bit different — what began as an atmospheric river transitioned into more of a classic soaking rain event as a center of low pressure passed overhead. That brewed downpours and isolated thunderstorm activity, which led to higher rainfall rates.

During a three-hour window in San Francisco between roughly 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. Saturday, the airport measured 2.63 inches of rain.

Nearby Oakland nabbed its wettest day since records began in 1970, with 4.75 inches of rain. Redwood City saw 4.88 inches, its third-greatest daily total in the past 116 years.

So much rain fell on the final day of the year that it accounted for one-quarter to one-third of 2022's total precipitation at multiple locations from San Francisco to Stockton, according to Weather Service data.

The same storm caused [rockslides](#), including on Highway 1 [south of Big Sur](#), and toppled trees whose roots were loosened in the saturated soils. On Buena Vista Avenue in East San Francisco, [a tree came crashing down onto parked cars](#), halting the progress of a nearby bus.

Flooding was reported in numerous locations in Northern and Central California on Saturday. In San Ramon, east of San Francisco, [the fire department tweeted](#) that it responded to more than 100 flood- and storm-related incidents. Flood warnings were also issued around Sacramento, [where up to 3 inches of rain fell](#).

More rain is coming to California, which is welcome considering the state's long-standing [severe drought](#). However, the additional precipitation on saturated ground also poses the risk of more flooding.

A fast-moving system coming Monday night into Tuesday is expected to drop a quick half-inch or so mainly in the central and northern parts of the state. It will be followed by a more robust and slower-moving storm system that has the potential to dump at least 2 to 3 inches of rain Wednesday and Thursday.

Heavy mountain snows

High precipitation rates were also a staple of the snowfall that accompanied the system in the Sierra Nevada. Snow fell predominantly above 7,000 feet in elevation, with exceptional accumulations above 9,000 feet.

The University of California at Berkeley Central Sierra Snow Lab, which researches Sierra snowfall and water resources, observed snowfall rates [as high as 7.5 inches per hour Saturday afternoon](#). An on-site researcher noted that the snow was light and fluffy, with frigid temperatures boosting the “fluff factor” of the snow.

Climate change connections

While storms like this do periodically occur, heavy precipitation rates are made more likely by the effects of human-induced climate change, which is warming the atmosphere.

As the atmosphere heats up, the air can hold more water. When moisture is unavailable, that translates to a desiccated landscape and drought. But when storm systems introduce moisture, as was the case Saturday, the atmosphere can store and unload more water, leading to higher precipitation totals.

The frequency of top-tier heavy-rain events is increasing markedly, even if overall precipitation totals over a year may not exhibit the same trend. Days with 2 inches or more of rain at San Francisco International Airport are more than 60 percent more common nowadays compared with the 1950s.

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HEADLINE	01/01 Job, wage growth show signs of cooling
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/robust-job-and-wage-growth-showed-signs-of-cooling-in-late-2022-11672539128?mod=us_lead_story
GIST	<p>The labor market proved to be a resilient stabilizer in 2022 for a U.S. economy facing the highest inflation in four decades.</p> <p>With the Federal Reserve having raised interest rates at the fastest pace since the early 1980s to fight inflation, however, the economy has slowed, and effects of that are filtering into hiring and wages.</p> <p>The unemployment rate was 3.7% in November, according to the Labor Department, just above half-century lows matched earlier in 2022. Fed officials forecast the rate to rise to 4.6% in the fourth quarter of 2023, in economic projections released in December.</p> <p>Here is what underpinned the labor market’s resilience in 2022, and what lies ahead in 2023.</p> <p>U.S. employers added an average of 392,000 jobs a month in 2022 through November, according to Labor Department figures. While slower than in 2021, the hiring pace was more than double that of 2019, the year before the pandemic began.</p> <p>Gains were led by the leisure and hospitality sector, which includes restaurants, hotels and tourist attractions. The industry accounted for about one in five net jobs added in the first 11 months of 2022. Job gains were also strong in other service sectors.</p> <p>“Workers at the lower end of the income distribution in areas like leisure and hospitality, transportation, and retail did particularly well,” said Aneta Markowska, chief financial economist at Jefferies. “Demand for services was just enormous.”</p> <p>The pace of hiring cooled in the second half of 2022, and several large employers laid off workers or planned to cut jobs, including Goldman Sachs Group Inc., Meta Platforms Inc. and Amazon.com Inc.</p>

While those moves didn't result in an increase in [broad layoff figures](#) in late 2022, economists surveyed in the fall by The Wall Street Journal forecast employers [to start shedding jobs](#) in 2023.

Wages grew at a historically strong rate in 2022, though the gains failed to keep pace with inflation. [Average hourly earnings](#) for private-sector employers rose 5.1% in November, from a year earlier, while [consumer prices](#) rose 7.1% during the same period, according to the Labor Department.

Median wages for [leisure and hospitality workers](#) advanced 7% in the 12 months ended in November, the most of any industry tracked by the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta. Wages in the trade and transportation and the manufacturing sectors grew more than overall pay.

"The fastest wage growth was where there was this combination of strong demand for workers, relatively reticent labor supply and lower pay," said Nick Bunker, an economist at the jobs site Indeed.

Lower-paying sectors have seen a slowdown in wage growth in recent months, Mr. Bunker said, referring to [Indeed's wage tracker](#), which looks at advertised wages.

That tracker showed wage growth in 82% of industries was lower in November than six months earlier. If pay changes remain on the same trajectory, wage growth will return to prepandemic levels by the second half of 2023, Mr. Bunker said.

One factor supporting wage growth in 2022 was the struggle many employers had in finding workers.

Job openings exceeded the number of people who were unemployed and seeking work throughout 2022, according to the Labor Department, though the gap began to narrow. The labor-force participation rate, or the share of workers who are employed or seeking a job, hasn't recovered to its prepandemic level.

"The labor-force participation rate is likely to continue to trend down over time as the population ages," said Stephen Stanley, chief economist at Amherst Pierpont Securities.

Some of the decline in labor supply can be attributed to [early retirements](#) triggered by the pandemic. Mr. Stanley said that those who retired early aren't likely to return to the labor force.

The participation rate for prime-age workers—those between the ages of 25 and 54—approached prepandemic levels in the summer but has edged down in recent months. The rate remains lower among [workers in their early 20s](#).

The unemployment rate in 2022 fell to match the half-century lows set in 2019 and early 2020, just before the pandemic began. The November rate was up slightly from the 3.5% low for 2022, set in September and July.

Some private economists expect the unemployment rate to rise more than the Fed projects.

Ms. Markowska of Jefferies said she expects the unemployment rate to reach about 5% by the end of 2023 and then continue rising in the following year. Economists from Nomura forecast a 5.9% unemployment rate in late 2023.

"Since there isn't much upside for labor-force growth, any upward pressure on unemployment will more likely come from job losses," said Ms. Markowska. That would "drag down consumption, impacting top-line growth negatively for a lot of businesses, which will force them to cut more costs and shed labor," she added.

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HEADLINE	01/02 Big banks predict US recession 2023
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/big-banks-predict-recession-fed-pivot-in-2023-11672618563

Big banks are predicting that an economic downturn is fast approaching.

More than two-thirds of the economists at 23 large financial institutions that do business directly with the Federal Reserve are betting the U.S. will have a recession in 2023. Two others are predicting a recession in 2024.

The firms, known as primary dealers, are a collection of trading firms and investment banks that include companies such as [Barclays](#) PLC, [Bank of America](#) Corp., TD Securities and [UBS Group](#) AG. They cite a number of red flags: Americans are spending down [their pandemic savings](#). The [housing market is in decline](#), and banks are tightening their lending standards.

“We expect a downturn in global GDP growth in 2023, led by recessions in both the U.S. and the eurozone,” economists at [BNP Paribas](#) SA wrote in the bank’s 2023 outlook, titled “Steering Into Recession.”

The main culprit is the Federal Reserve, economists said, which has been raising rates for months to try to slow the economy and curb inflation. Though [inflation has eased recently](#), it is still much higher than the Fed’s desired target.

The Fed raised rates seven times in 2022, pushing its benchmark from a range of 0% to 0.25% to the current 4.25% to 4.50%, [a 15-year high](#). Officials signaled in December that they plan to keep raising rates to between 5% and 5.5% in 2023.

Most of the economists surveyed by The Wall Street Journal expect the higher rates will push [the unemployment level](#) from November’s 3.7% to above 5%—still low by historical standards, but that increase would mean that millions of Americans would lose their jobs.

Most also expect the U.S. economy to contract in 2023.

Though the economy has held up relatively well during the 2022 rate increases—jobless claims remain low, for example—economists said the cooling effects of higher interest rates [will filter through more noticeably](#) in 2023. U.S. interest rates are still well below historical levels but are the highest since 2008, ahead of the global financial crisis.

Of course, almost everyone on Wall Street and in Washington [got 2022 wrong](#)—from the Fed’s insistence that inflation would be transitory to top Wall Street analysts who projected a banal year of growth for stock and bond prices. The extent to which investors, analysts and economists were wrong-footed has left many looking at the coming year with a sense of unease.

Still, economists and asset managers point to a number of indicators that have traditionally portended recessions: Banks have tightened lending standards, and demand has weakened to near levels typically associated with recessions. The Conference Board’s collection of leading economic indicators has fallen for nine months in a row, reaching levels that have historically preceded recessions. And gauges that track overall business activity and the services and manufacturing sectors have fallen to some of the lowest levels since the Covid-induced 2020 recession.

Further, U.S. government bonds maturing between three months and two years hold higher yields than bonds maturing in 10, 20 or 30 years. This so-called [inverted yield curve](#) is a warning sign that has occurred before every U.S. recession since World War II.

The excess savings that Americans socked away at the height of the pandemic have dwindled to \$1.2 trillion from about \$2.3 trillion, according to data from the Fed. Deutsche Bank analysts expect that to be fully exhausted by October.

	<p>Consumer “demand is slowing and we think it will slow sharply as excess savings starts to run out and consumers are more stressed,” said Brett Ryan, senior U.S. economist at Deutsche Bank. Businesses will also likely have to pull back on capital expenditures, Mr. Ryan said.</p> <p>To be sure, a majority of the economists who expect the U.S. economy to contract predict it will be a “shallow” or “mild” recession. They expect the economy and U.S. equity markets to rebound late in 2023, thanks largely to the Fed pivoting to rate cuts. They largely expect bonds to deliver strong returns in 2023, while stocks finish the year up slightly.</p> <p>Most outlooks predict the Fed will raise interest rates in the first quarter, pause in the second and begin cutting rates in the third or fourth quarter.</p> <p>They expect the Fed’s pivot to bring increased volatility to the stock market but overall deliver middling returns. The average outlook targets have the S&P 500 about 5% higher than its current level at the end of 2023. A few are calling for the S&P to fall from its current level by the end of 2023, including Barclays and Société Générale SA.</p> <p>“Equities look very rich,” said Steven Abrahams, senior managing director at Amherst Pierpont. “It’s an easy call to allocate out of equities, into bonds.”</p> <p>Just five of the 23 financial institutions surveyed by the Journal said they expect the U.S. to avoid recession in 2023 and 2024: Credit Suisse Group AG, Goldman Sachs Group Inc., HSBC Holdings PLC, JPMorgan Chase & Co. and Morgan Stanley.</p> <p>“Several historically reliable lead indicators are sending recession signals, but in our view these measures are unable to correctly gauge recession risk in the current environment,” Jeremy Schwartz, senior U.S. economist at Credit Suisse, wrote in the bank’s 2023 economic outlook.</p> <p>But even these relatively optimistic economists predict the U.S. economy will grow much more slowly than it has over the past 20 years.</p> <p>They project growth for the year will slow to about 0.5%, on average. The economy grew at an average pace of 2.1% from 2012 to 2021.</p> <p>Goldman has the rosiest outlook for 2023, predicting 1% growth in U.S. gross domestic product.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/01 New year Ukraine northern frontline
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/01/new-year-on-ukraines-north-frontline-sumy-region-volunteer-defence-russia
GIST	<p>On New Year’s Eve in a patch of forest along the north-east border with Russia, a unit of Ukrainian territorial defence forces stood guard in their trenches.</p> <p>Ukraine’s most senior defence officials have said they believe Russia will attempt a second invasion from the north in the next couple of months, using troops who have been training for the past three months since being mobilised in October. But the Ukrainian forces defending the border say the Russians will not be able to break through as they did in February, when the Sumy region had no defensive lines.</p> <p>“The coordinates of all the roads are known and as soon as [Russian forces are on them]: ‘Bam’,” said Andriy, a 52-year-old commander, using his hands to show ammunition hitting a target. “Then there are swamps, and let’s not get started on the mines.”</p> <p>At night, the Ukrainian defence forces are alone in the forests and fields. It is pitch black and silent. The area was considered remote before the war; now, they say, only a handful of residents remain in the nearby villages. Between their positions and the Russian forces a few kilometres away are some forests, swamps</p>

and a couple of highways, so they must blend into their surroundings as much as possible. Those on patrol can only be made out from the faint moonlight, reflected slightly by the snow on the surrounding fields.

Those off duty sat underground, preparing a new year's feast in a brightly lit, wood cabin-esque kitchen, one of several they built after being stationed along the north-east border four months ago. Off the zigzagging, metres-deep muddy corridors of the trenches, there were also several sleeping quarters and even a sauna.

These isolated positions do not carry the battle status of Ukraine's eastern and southern regions, such as Bakhmut, but their importance should not be underestimated. They constitute the first line of defence if Russia decides to reinvade from the north, and their success could determine more than just the fate of Sumy region.

During the February invasion, Russian forces broke through in several places along the northern border with the intention of surrounding and occupying Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, and thus seizing control of the centre of power.

The Sumy territorial defence units have been credited by western military experts and commended several times by Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, for thwarting Russian attempts to establish supply corridors from Russia through Sumy to eastern Kyiv – their actions thereby contributed to saving the central command in the capital.

Videos from March show members of these units, some in their civilian clothes and equipped with little body armour and few rifles, destroying Russian tanks and taking Russian soldiers as prisoners. Two men involved in the defence of Sumy said the 50 or so professional forces that were in the regional capital on 24 February were ordered to go to another area that evening, leaving them and about 400 other untrained citizens to protect the city.

Ukraine's territorial defence units consist of people who volunteered to take up arms, the majority of whom did so on the day Russia invaded or shortly afterwards. Some of them have previous military experience, while others do not.

Ukraine's northern frontline has been static since the Russians were pushed out in the spring. The Russians periodically shell the border areas "just to scare" Ukrainian forces rather than as part of a build-up to a fresh offensive, say the men.

Both Ukraine's defence minister, Oleksii Reznikov, and the commander-in-chief of its armed forces, Valeriy Zaluzhnyi, have named February as a possible period for attempted re-invasion. However, the country's chief of defence intelligence, Kyrylo Budanov, has said the threat of a second northern invasion is low but possible.

In a recent interview with the New York Times, Budanov described Russia's movement of equipment into the area as a "disinformation campaign" to draw Ukrainian forces away from the battles in the east. He said his intelligence body had not yet detected the type of offensive units required for an invasion in the border areas with Russia and Belarus.

Spokespeople for Budanov and the ministry of defence did not respond to questions on why the two held different assessments.

Serhiy, who defended Sumy city until the regular army arrived in April, said now there were mines, defence lines, troops and equipment in the region, whereas last February there had been almost nothing, so it would be illogical for the Russians to try again. "[But] they don't have to follow logic as we know," said Serhiy.

On New Year's Eve, Russia launched a barrage of rockets and drones throughout the day and night targeting Kyiv and other big cities, killing at least one person and seriously injuring more than a dozen

	<p>others. Russia also shelled the border region in Sumy almost 120 times, according to Ukraine's general staff. Luckily for the men, their position survived unscathed.</p> <p>In the trench kitchen, the men described who they used to be before the war – a teacher at a sports college, a cement trader, a property developer, an academic.</p> <p>For some, it has been nine months since they have seen their families. Even though they mobilised voluntarily, they are obliged to stay until the war ends or it will count as desertion. They only get leave in the event of extenuating family circumstances.</p> <p>They have become a sort of family of their own – with different trenches cooking and often inviting each other for dinner. For new year, one man's relatives had posted a cake to the post office in a village south of them. Two people were in charge of cooking and they had bought a small tree that they were decorating, while others played draughts.</p> <p>But their proximity to Russian forces was difficult to forget entirely, despite the festive spirit. The day after they arrived at their position in summer, they were shelled 136 times, they said.</p> <p>"If we had the weapons, we would just finish them," said Andriy. "We just want this to end."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/01 Desire to break war deadlock in 2023?
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/01/zelenskiy-and-putin-signal-desire-to-break-wars-deadlock-in-new-year
GIST	<p>Russia's war on Ukraine enters its second calendar year at a delicate point. It is six weeks after the liberation of Kherson and there has been little movement in the frontlines either way since. There is not yet any sign of a full, renewed counteroffensive by the Ukrainians, not helped by the weather which has been above freezing, leaving muddy ground not conducive to military manoeuvre.</p> <p>"The situation is just stuck," Ukraine's head of military intelligence, Kyrylo Budanov, told the BBC last week, which, if an accurate assessment, is not helpful to Kyiv, badly needing to retain momentum in the run-up to spring. But the political leadership of both countries clearly signalled a desire to try to break the deadlock with new goals for the new year.</p> <p>Volodymyr Zelenskiy's new year address emphasised, predictably enough, a long-term goal of victory in the war. Twice, notably, he referenced liberating Melitopol, the most obvious target city, whose capture would cut off the land bridge without which Crimea cannot easily be resupplied. Zelenskiy said Ukrainian grandchildren would one day be able to "eat watermelons" in the recently liberated Kherson "and the cherry in Melitopol".</p> <p>All this may be too obvious, of course, and Ukraine has repeatedly shown it is willing to be tactically flexible, to probe Russia's lines for weakness and seek a breakthrough. But the other areas where Ukraine has been pressing, near Kreminna and towards Svatove in northern Luhansk, are simply not as strategically significant; while in the Donbas region, around Bakhmut, Ukraine remains on the defensive, soaking up Russian bombardment as its forces make incremental gains in and around the frontline.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Vladimir Putin said the goal of Russia's war, or special military operation, as he insists on calling it, was to protect "our people in our historical territories in the new regions of the Russian Federation" – a reference to the four oblasts that Moscow unilaterally annexed in September – implying that it remained necessary to try to capture them all, which would explain why the attacks on Bakhmut have continued throughout autumn and winter.</p> <p>Whatever Putin might say, the slow to minimal progress in Bakhmut is one of a number of indications that Russia lacks offensive combat power. In a Ukrainian TV interview highlighted by the Institute for the Study of War, Budanov said Russia had gone from firing 60,000 shells a day (the top of the range</p>

	<p>suggested by Ukraine's most senior military commander in August) to “19,000 to 20,000”, explaining why Russia has been so keen to seek arms from Iran and North Korea.</p> <p>Much of Moscow's military effort has gone into a cruel and relentless bombardment of Ukraine's energy infrastructure, leading to longer and longer blackouts across key cities. But there are very tentative signs here too that Russia is faltering: it fired about 20 cruise missiles at Ukraine on New Year's Eve – serious of course, but nothing like the 80 to 100 it unleashed on days in October and November, although only a few days earlier in December, 69 missiles were fired at Ukrainian targets.</p> <p>Ukraine's air defences, a focus of western supply efforts, appear to be improving, particularly against slower-flying Shahed drones. On Sunday, the air force claimed it had shot down all 32 of the drones launched since midnight, and in Kyiv only a car was damaged overnight.</p> <p>The situation remains perilous and hard to predict, but Moscow's assault on Ukraine's energy grid has not weakened the Ukrainians' resolve.</p> <p>Russia, as Putin's speech made clear, is preparing for a long war. Roughly half of the 300,000 people mobilised last year have yet to be deployed on the frontline, and Ukraine is warning that a fresh mobilisation could come within days. Even if Russian munition stocks are dipping, Ukraine may find it harder to gain ground in any future counterattacks, if its adversary deploys its forces effectively.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/02 Day 313 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/02/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-313-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A New Year's Day attack on a complex in the Russian-controlled city of Makiivka has killed scores of recently mobilised troops sent by Moscow, according to reports on both sides, in what could be one of the deadliest known incidents involving Russian conscripts so far. Without claiming the strike, Ukraine's military command said up to 400 Russian soldiers were killed in the incident in the city in the Moscow-controlled parts of the Donetsk region. Pro-Russian authorities late on Sunday acknowledged that there were casualties, but did not comment on the Ukrainian figures. • Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy has praised Ukrainians for showing gratitude to the troops and one another and said Russia's efforts would prove useless. “Drones, missiles, everything else will not help them,” he said of the Russians. “Because we stand united. They are united only by fear.” Ukraine's air defence systems worked through the night to bring down incoming drones and to warn communities of the approaching danger, Reuters reported. • Several waves of Russian drones targeted critical infrastructure in Ukraine's capital of Kyiv and surrounding areas early on Monday morning. Air raid alerts were issued in Kyiv and across eastern Ukraine, beginning just before midnight and still wailing hours later. Debris from a destroyed drone hit Kyiv's northeastern Desnianskiy district, wounding a 19-year-old man who was later taken to hospital, the city's Mayor Vitali Klitschko said. • The Ukrainian ministry of defence claimed it shot down 39 Iranian-made Shahed drones, as well as a cruise missile, last night. Earlier we reported that Ukraine's regional military command in the country's east said air defence systems destroyed nine Iranian-made Shahed drones over the Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhzhia regions by the early hours of Monday. Zelenskiy, added that “45 ‘Shaheds’ were shot down on the first night of the year” in his Monday evening address. • Ukraine has published the latest figures in relation to Russian losses since the beginning of the invasion last February. It says an estimated 107,440 Russian soldiers have been killed, while it claims to have destroyed 283 aircraft and more than 3,000 Russian tanks. • Over the last five days, Russian and Ukrainian forces have probably been fighting for control of the P66 highway, north of the Russian-held Luhansk town of Kremina, the UK Ministry of Defence reports. The P66 is a “key supply route for the northern section of Russia's Donbas front from the Belgorod region of Russia” and its use has been disrupted by Ukrainian artillery since October, the ministry adds.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a result of overnight strikes on the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, energy infrastructure facilities were damaged, causing power and heating outages, city mayor Klitschko said on Monday. • Ukraine’s most senior defence officials have said they believe Russia will attempt a second invasion from the north in the next couple of months, using troops who have been training for the past three months since being mobilised in October. But the Ukrainian forces defending the border say the Russians will not be able to break through as they did in February, when the Sumy region had no defensive lines. • Russia claimed its strikes against Ukraine on New Year’s Eve – including the launch of more than 20 cruise missiles that killed at least three people – were targeting its neighbour’s drone production. A children’s hospital was among the buildings said to have been hit by Russian shelling. Ukrainian officials claim Russia is deliberately targeting civilians to sow fear. • Russian leaders issued a series of defiant messages ahead of the new year. President Vladimir Putin said Russia would “never give in” to the west, and was fighting for its “motherland, truth and justice ... so that Russia’s security can be guaranteed”.
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HEADLINE	01/02 IMF: 1/3rd of world economy to hit recession
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/jan/02/third-of-world-economy-to-hit-recession-in-2023-imf-head-warns
GIST	<p>For much of the global economy, 2023 is going to be a tough year as the main engines of global growth – the US, Europe and China – all experience weakening activity, the head of the International Monetary Fund has warned.</p> <p>The new year is going to be “tougher than the year we leave behind,” IMF managing director Kristalina Georgieva said on the CBS Sunday morning news program Face the Nation on Sunday.</p> <p>“Why? Because the three big economies – the US, EU and China – are all slowing down simultaneously,” she said.</p> <p>“We expect one-third of the world economy to be in recession. Even countries that are not in recession, it would feel like recession for hundreds of millions of people,” she added.</p> <p>In October, the IMF cut its outlook for global economic growth in 2023, reflecting the continuing drag from the war in Ukraine as well as inflation pressures and the high interest rates engineered by central banks like the US Federal Reserve aimed at bringing those price pressures to heel.</p> <p>Georgieva said that China, the world’s second-largest economy, is likely to grow at or below global growth for the first time in 40 years as Covid-19 cases surge following the dismantling of its ultra-strict zero-Covid policy.</p> <p>“For the first time in 40 years, China’s growth in 2022 is likely to be at or below global growth,” Georgieva said.</p> <p>Moreover, a “bushfire” of expected Covid infections there in the months ahead are likely to further hit its economy and drag on both regional and global growth, said Georgieva, who traveled to China on IMF business late last month.</p> <p>“For the next couple of months, it would be tough for China, and the impact on Chinese growth would be negative, the impact on the region will be negative, the impact on global growth will be negative,” she said.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Georgieva said, the US economy is standing apart and may avoid the outright contraction that is likely to afflict as much as a third of the world’s economies.</p>

	<p>The “US is most resilient,” she said, and it “may avoid recession. We see the labour market remaining quite strong.”</p> <p>“This is ... a mixed blessing because if the labour market is very strong, the Fed may have to keep interest rates tighter for longer to bring inflation down,” Georgieva said.</p> <p>The US job market will be a central focus for Federal Reserve officials who would like to see demand for labour slacken to help undercut price pressures. The first week of the new year brings a raft of key data on the employment front, including Friday’s monthly nonfarm payrolls report, which is expected to show the US economy minted another 200,000 jobs in December and the jobless rate remained at 3.7% – near the lowest since the 1960s.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/01 Backlash drag queen story hours to kids
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/1/drag-queen-story-hours-children-grow-across-us-so-/
GIST	<p>The San Francisco Public Library held the first drag queen story hour in December 2015, and it could have been the last. Instead, a cultural phenomenon was born.</p> <p>Since then, cross-dressing men in exaggerated makeup and costumes have made hundreds of appearances in public libraries nationwide, opening another front in the pitched battle over exposing children to sexually charged concepts in the name of diversity and inclusion.</p> <p>Why drag queens?</p> <p>“Drag itself is very mesmerizing. It’s over the top. It’s outrageous. It steps outside boundaries and social norms and gender norms that people normally wouldn’t cross, and that is captivating to people,” said Jonathan Hamilt, executive director of the national nonprofit Drag Story Hour.</p> <p>“If you meet that with story hour, it’s a great way to show kids that creativity is boundless,” he told The Washington Times. “You can explore different ways of thinking and creativity and artistry.”</p> <p>Critics are increasingly pushing back. In the past few months, protesters have greeted drag queen story hours in California, Maryland and New York. A drag queen reading at a school in Columbus, Ohio, was canceled in December over security concerns about a planned rally by the Proud Boys militia.</p> <p>Where there are Proud Boys, Antifa cannot be far behind. Black-clad Antifa activists carrying Pride flags and realistic-looking rifles arrived in November at a bookstore in Denton, Texas, claiming to provide security for Transgender Story Time featuring a man dressed as a woman.</p> <p>Outside a Drag Queen Story Hour in New York City, YouTube personality Alex Stein led demonstrators in chants of “Antifa, go home” and “leave the kids alone.”</p> <p>“Letting children have drag queens read to them – that’s disgusting. You guys should be disgusted with yourselves. That’s sexual indoctrination. Why would a kid need to know anything about sex?” asked Mr. Stein, as shown in a Dec. 10 video outside the New York Public Library.</p> <p>Even so, the demand for drag queens is rising and spreading from public libraries to K-12 schools and universities.</p> <p>“Last June, we had almost an event a day during Pride Month,” Mr. Hamilt said. “We’re in public schools, private schools and then school libraries within those schools, and in the public libraries.”</p> <p>Drag Story Hour, which dropped the word “queen” to include female “drag kings” who impersonate men, lists 32 chapters in 20 states and the District of Columbia, as well as in Denmark, Germany, Sweden and Japan.</p>

Reading, singing songs and making crafts with 3- to 8-year-olds in libraries isn't all the drag queens do.

"We're expanding," Mr. Hamilt said. "We work with kids with autism and other special needs. We do bilingual readings. We work with senior citizens. We work with middle schoolers and high schoolers. We speak at lots of universities and conferences in higher education. We have a lot of diverse programming we do all throughout our community. It's not just reading storybooks to children."

Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel, a Democrat, said in a speech that there should be "a drag queen for every school."

"Not only are they not hurting our kids, drag queens make everything better. Drag queens are fun. Drag queens are entertainment," Ms. Nessel said in a video posted by the Michigan Freedom Fund.

'Queer role models'

Drag queens have been performing since at least the 1800s, but mainly in specialized bars, nightclubs and competitions. After the reality show "RuPaul's Drag Race" debuted in 2009, the phenomenon went mainstream.

The 2015 San Francisco reading was the brainchild of Michelle Tea, a former executive director of Radar Productions, based on her "personal desire to connect her toddler with queer culture," according to the 2020 Curriculum Inquiry paper "Drag Pedagogy: The playful practice of queer imagination in early childhood" by University of British Columbia professor Harper Keenan and Lil Miss Hot Mess, the drag name of Harris Kornstein.

Mr. Hamilt has been involved almost since the beginning. In 2016, he became the first drag queen to host a children's story hour at a bookstore in New York City. He was inspired by the San Francisco reading, held at a library in the city's predominantly gay Castro District.

"I was like, 'Oh, this is amazing,'" said Mr. Hamilt, whose drag name is Ona Louise. "I've done charity bingos around New York City, I've raised a lot of money for different nonprofits, and I was like, 'Oh, this is even better. I could read to kids and spread literacy and talk about diversity.'"

Having a drag storyteller read to children is "a great way for them to experience diversity and otherness at a young age," he said.

"When you grow up to be an adult in the real world, you're going to have co-workers and neighbors and family members who look and act different from you," Mr. Hamilt said, "and we want them to not be bigoted or racist or homophobic."

Promoting literacy and combating bigotry have nearly universal support, but critics worry that the story hours go beyond those ideas to advance a radical agenda that includes undermining the traditional family.

Manhattan Institute senior fellow Christopher Rufo said exposing children to drag queens is part of an effort to "subvert the system of heteronormativity, which includes childhood innocence, and reengineer childhood sexuality from the ground up."

"The drag queen might appear as a comic figure, but he carries an utterly serious message: the deconstruction of sex, the reconstruction of child sexuality and the subversion of middle-class family life," Mr. Rufo said in an autumn 2022 City Journal article, "The Real Story Behind Drag Queen Story Hour."

The Daily Citizen, a publication of the conservative Focus on the Family, called it "a concerted effort to come after your children and grandchildren so they participate in and adopt sexual and gender radicalness."

The program took a hit in 2019 when a Houston Public Library drag storyteller was found to be a registered sex offender. The library apologized, said it had failed to complete a background check and put the event on hiatus. Mr. Hamilt said the reading was organized by a “rogue group” and not Drag Story Hour.

Some storytellers read from classic children’s books, and others select gender-bending children’s titles such as “Cinderelliot,” “If You’re a Drag Queen and You Know It,” “The Hips on the Drag Queen Go Swish, Swish, Swish,” “The Gender Wheel,” “Bye, Bye Binary” and a book about pronouns called “They, She, He, easy as ABC.”

Drag Story Hour NYC developed and sells “The Dragtivity Book,” a coloring book designed “for classroom use” that includes activities such as “find your own drag name” and “circle your pronouns.”

The “Drag Pedagogy” paper fueled the backlash with statements such as “DQSH offers a queer relationality with children that breaks from the reproductive futurity of the normative classroom and nuclear family.”

Even the Drag Story Hour website suggests that fighting hate is not the only goal. It says story hour “captures the imagination and play of the gender fluidity of childhood and gives kids glamorous, positive and unabashedly queer role models.”

“In spaces like this, kids are able to see people who defy rigid gender restrictions and imagine a world where everyone can be their authentic selves,” the website says.

Not all opposition comes from the right. Gays Against Groomers opposes “the sexualization and indoctrination of children,” including drag queen story hours and drag shows involving children.

Mr. Hamilt chalked up the pushback to “homophobia and transphobia.”

“We’re reading children’s books, we’re singing children’s songs,” he said. “If we were doing anything other than that, we wouldn’t be around for seven years. No place would allow any type of adult entertainment if that were happening.”

Despite the concerns, public libraries are standing behind the story hours.

After a Dec. 17 protest outside a library in New York City’s Chelsea neighborhood, the New York Public Library defended the programming by citing the “rise of hate and violence targeting LGBTQ+ communities.”

“A group of protesters attempted to disrupt a Drag Story Hour for neurodiverse children,” the library system said in a statement. “The story hour went on as planned, including readings, coloring activities and a ‘dance party’ at the end. Our patrons enjoy Drag Story Hour, and the Library will continue to offer programs that support a diverse array of voices.”

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HEADLINE	01/01 New details CIA divisive defector dispute
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/1/once-secret-files-reveal-new-details-cias-divisive/
GIST	<p>Once-secret government documents reveal long-hidden details on one of the CIA’s most prominent Cold War controversies, involving defecting Soviet intelligence agents and U.S. counterspy programs targeting the Kremlin’s strategic deception operations against the West.</p> <p>Documents made public last month include formerly top-secret interviews with senior CIA counterintelligence officials, including legendary counterspy chief James Jesus Angleton, who was at the center of the bitter, long-running dispute inside the agency over the reliability of two top Soviet defectors, Yuri Nosenko and Anatoli Golitsyn.</p>

The controversy relates to the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963 and the role of Nosenko, a KGB agent who defected shortly after the shooting in Dallas. Angleton and his staff thought Nosenko was a false defector dispatched by Moscow to mislead U.S. intelligence regarding Kennedy's assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald.

Angleton, who died in 1987, remains a towering figure in intelligence circles among supporters and detractors, a shadowy master counterspy who became the subject of novels and nonfiction for decades. David Robarge, an official CIA historian, described Angleton as "one of the most influential and divisive intelligence officers in U.S. history."

"He shaped CIA counterintelligence for better or worse for 20 years from 1954 to 1974 — nearly half of the agency's Cold War existence — and his eccentricities and excesses have been widely portrayed as paradigmatic of how not to conduct counterintelligence," Mr. Robarge said.

Others credit Angleton with protecting CIA operations from spy penetration by using defectors from Moscow that helped roll up large numbers of Soviet spies and agents around the world.

Before leaving the CIA in December 1974, Angleton sought to reorient the agency as a strategic counterintelligence service that would target the KGB and related spy agencies to take down the Soviet Union. Instead, the agency's counterintelligence function after his departure was downgraded and removed as an independent function. Critics say the action resulted in significant failures at the agency years later.

A CIA spokeswoman declined to comment on Angleton and the defector controversy. The CIA is committed to "maximum transparency" in releasing government records on the Kennedy assassination, she said.

New details

Classified U.S. government documents released Dec. 15 related to the Kennedy assassination provide details of Angleton and his efforts to find moles — Soviet penetration agents — and counter what he regarded as a significant threat to U.S. security. A 1975 report to a presidential commission probing the agency's domestic activities includes testimony by the former CIA counterspy chief, who was forced out of his job in December 1974.

In the document, Angleton warned the commission headed by then-Vice President Nelson Rockefeller that U.S. anti-Soviet counterintelligence efforts had been severely weakened at the CIA after his departure. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover considered the program a low priority, he said.

Angleton told the commission that he regarded defector Golitsyn as a superior intelligence source with intimate knowledge of a major Soviet strategic deception operation. The program, Angleton said, involved the widespread use of false defectors such as Nosenko and disinformation operations designed to fool and frustrate Western intelligence agencies, he said.

Angleton said Golitsyn gained extraordinary access to Soviet secrets and that U.S.-Soviet detente — the policy of easing relations that began under President Nixon — was a strategic deception aimed at subverting the West.

"If there is validity to the information derived from Golitsyn, then it would follow that detente and estimates derived therefrom are misleading with regard to events in Portugal, Vietnam and other areas where we are in competition with the Soviets and the bloc," he said. Most information provided from official Soviet contacts is "spurious," Angleton added.

Analysts could glean more accurate intelligence if they relied less on public or overt reporting on Soviet intentions in dispatches from diplomats and instead turned to secret information from sources within the Soviet system “whose warnings regarding disinformation have been universally ignored,” he said.

The CIA counterspy chief told the commission that officials spent “several thousand man-hours” analyzing Nosenko’s information, and key elements of his testimony produced doubts that Nosenko’s defection was legitimate.

Nosenko, who was held in detention for three years after his defection in an unsuccessful effort to break him, asserted that he had read the case file on Oswald while in the KGB internal security service. Oswald was a former Marine who defected to Moscow and later returned to the U.S. and carried out the assassination. Oswald’s time in Russia and his possible links to the Soviet government became subjects of intense scrutiny in the investigation.

Angleton said in testimony that he blocked the Warren Commission investigating the assassination from using Nosenko’s information because of suspicions that Nosenko was a plant who remained secretly loyal to the KGB.

Nosenko was regarded as a “dispatched agent” sent to provide false information about the assassination and about the ring of Soviet agents in Britain such as senior MI-6 double agent Kim Philby and four confederates. Nosenko also was thought to have provided false information about KGB operations in France and double agents in the United States, Angleton testified.

“Given the timing of his defection, shortly after the assassination, his account – not borne out by the initial polygraph – may be viewed as exonerating the Soviets of any complicity with Oswald, thus supporting the flimsy documentation on Oswald handed over to the U.S. government by the USSR,” Angleton stated.

Angleton also doubted Nosenko’s claim that Soviet agents had not penetrated the U.S. government.

“This assertion flew in the face of the overview which Golitsyn gave to us regarding Soviet bloc penetrations of Western services and strategic deception,” he said.

In 1978, however, then-Deputy Chief of CIA Counterintelligence Leonard McCoy wrote a 57-page assessment defending Nosenko and criticizing Golitsyn.

McCoy, who died in 2019, called Nosenko one of the CIA’s most essential defectors. He said Nosenko inflicted significant damage on the KGB despite showing signs, as did other defectors, of a personality disorder.

“The evidence shows that he has damaged the Soviet intelligence effort more than all the other KGB defectors combined,” McCoy stated in a memorandum released in December.

McCoy said Nosenko identified 73 past, present or potential American agents for the KGB and 97 other foreign spy suspects. He also supplied 200 leads and identified more than 400 KGB officers and agents.

John Schindler, a former counterintelligence official at the National Security Agency, said there is little doubt that the defector debate over Golitsyn and Nosenko boiled down to Nosenko’s bona fides and created internal “churn and chaos” at the CIA.

“Although some of this has been overblown, particularly among anti-Angleton partisans, the debate was real and divisive,” he said. He added that Golitsyn became a “fantasist” but Nosenko also told lies and fabrications.

“While I hold Angleton in high regard generally, nobody should head your counterintelligence office for 20 years as he did. It’s too much. It strains the senses,” Mr. Schindler said.

Seeking 'Sasha'

The Golitsyn intelligence set off a hunt within the CIA by Angleton to identify a high-level Soviet agent in the agency identified only as "Sasha."

The mole hunt led to a backlash against Angleton and counterintelligence within the agency. Beginning in 1975, CIA leaders dismantled the independent counterintelligence division and its scores of officials involved in analysis and operations.

Within two decades after Angleton and his top deputies left the CIA, the agency sustained some of its worst foreign spy penetrations. The most spectacular was the case of turncoat CIA counterintelligence officer Aldrich Ames, who gave Moscow the names of nearly all CIA-recruited agents in Russia.

In 2010, the CIA suffered another major counterspy failure with the loss of many recruited agents in China, U.S. officials said. The CIA has not recovered from the intelligence losses at a time when Beijing has become the primary national security challenge and a key target of CIA spies.

Angleton said Golitsyn contradicted his information on Nosenko many times.

"We have concluded on the basis of present evidence that Nosenko was dispatched to the West to mutilate counterintelligence leads which had been revealed by Golitsyn," Angleton said. The Kremlin, to obscure any role in the assassination, insisted that Oswald was a tool of the U.S. military-industrial complex, he said.

Despite Angleton's doubts, the CIA eventually declared Nosenko a bona fide defector, something that Angleton testified "astounded" him and prompted calls to the agency for clarification. None was given.

"The Nosenko case goes to the quick of the counterintelligence problem facing not only the FBI and the agency but all Western intelligence and security services, many of whom have received information derived from Nosenko," he said.

Angleton warned that arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union could not be conducted effectively without better counterintelligence to identify strategic deception by the Soviets.

Golitsyn was the prized defector. Angleton testified that he was "probably without any question the most major defection since World War II as far as Soviet intentions, Soviet organization and Soviet operations are concerned."

The KGB agent planned his flight to the West years before his December 1961 defection. The years allowed him to break down the deepest KGB secrets and to obtain information valuable to U.S. intelligence and its allies.

Golitsyn maneuvered his way within the KGB bureaucracy by refusing foreign assignments and remaining within the spy service headquarters, Angleton said.

The most valuable intelligence Golitsyn provided were KGB code names and circumstantial evidence of widespread burrowing of KGB agents into key positions in the West.

After Golitsyn defected, the Soviets reassigned some 300 people and conducted a damage assessment looking at information he knew, information he did not have access to and information he was uncertain about, Angleton said.

Another indicator of Golitsyn's value to the CIA was revealed in letters found in the residence of a recruited KGB agent, Army Sgt. Jack Dunlap. The National Security Agency official committed suicide in 1962 after he was uncovered as a Soviet spy. The letters included notes from Angleton to the NSA related to information provided by Golitsyn.

Angleton testified that the CIA acted quickly to alert the other branches of the U.S. government and the French and British governments about Golitsyn's details of Soviet penetrations.

"So the leads ran into the thousands from Golitsyn, and thousands and thousands of pages of transcript, interrogation, exhibiting photographs and identifications, which in turn would refresh his memory on other courses," Angleton said.

The information helped bolster the case against Philby in Britain and the others known as the Cambridge spy ring, named after the university where the Soviets recruited them as students.

Angleton testified that Golitsyn called him after the Kennedy assassination and said all defectors to the Soviet Union were sent through the KGB's 13th Department, which conducts assassinations, sabotage and spying. The former CIA counterspy chief testified that Soviet documents provided to the U.S. government on Oswald made no mention of his processing by the 13th Department, another clue that raised suspicions.

British historian Christopher Andrew, in his 1999 book on the KGB called "The Sword and the Shield," revealed that Golitsyn ended up confusing the CIA by claiming the Sino-Soviet split was a deception, as was the Prague Spring uprising in Czechoslovakia against Soviet rule. The Andrew book is based on documents provided by another KGB defector, Vasili Mitrokhin, who worked in the KGB archives and brought out documents that shed light on the defector controversy at the CIA.

One KGB document revealed that Golitsyn's "treason" was damaging to the KGB and was the result of careerism.

Mr. Andrew, however, said KGB headquarters missed the value of Golitsyn's confusing information. "It did not occur to [KGB] Centre that Golitsyn's defection, by infecting a small but troublesome minority of CIA officers with his own paranoid tendencies, would ultimately do the agency more harm than good," he wrote.

Mr. Andrew stated that the CIA made a serious error in doubting Nosenko's bona fides. Nosenko began working with the CIA clandestinely in 1962 but did not defect to the United States until November 1964 – a year after the Kennedy assassination.

"Unaware of the CIA's horrendous misjudgment, the [KGB] regarded Nosenko's defection as a serious setback," he wrote.

The KGB damage assessment said Nosenko had been infected with the "virus of careerism," just like Golitsyn, Mr. Andrew said.

Angleton and Oswald

In the newly declassified testimony to the Senate committee, Angleton was asked directly whether he thought Oswald was a Soviet agent.

"Well, let me put it this way: I don't think the Oswald case is dead," he said. "There are too many leads that were never followed up."

He explained that the CIA had a double agent close to the KGB after the assassination who explained how Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev tipped off an American journalist during a visit to Cairo by telling the reporter that the plot to kill Kennedy was a right-wing conspiracy of businesses to place Vice President Lyndon Johnson in the White House.

One document released last month reveals that Nosenko's CIA handler, Tennant Bagley, stated in a November 1963 memorandum that Oswald met in October 1963 with KGB officer Valeri Kostikov in Mexico City. The memo described Kostikov as part of the KGB 13th Department in charge of "sabotage

and assassination.” The document follows a declassified report released several years ago linking Oswald to a KGB assassination official in Mexico.

Raymond Rocca, Angleton’s deputy in CIA counterintelligence in charge of research and analysis, also revealed in declassified testimony labeled “top secret” that the policy of detente coincided with a significant increase in Soviet intelligence operations in the United States and abroad.

Rocca, who died in 1993, revealed that the CIA conducted a covert operation to spy on CIA defector Philip Agee in Paris. He testified that the surveillance was needed because Agee wrote a book “that is going to be a massive blow to the security and identity of our operations in Latin America.”

Agee went on to identify CIA agents worldwide, including Richard Welch, who was assassinated in Greece in 1975 after his cover was blown.

Congress later passed the Intelligence Identities Protection Act making it illegal to disclose the identities of covert CIA officers.

Rocca also testified in support of the secret CIA program that started in the 1950s and continued until 1973 to intercept mail from the Soviet Union to the U.S. in a search for spies. The domestic spying program was criticized in congressional investigations in the 1970s as a violation of Americans’ privacy rights.

The mail program, based in New York City in cooperation with the U.S. postmaster general, was a “source of strategic importance for counterintelligence,” Rocca told the Rockefeller commission.

“It was capable of bearing indications that would have given us the identifications not only of legals” — foreign spies using diplomatic cover — “but of [deep cover agents] and other interests that the Soviets had that we could get in no other way,” Rocca said.

The mail program was used with intelligence from six or seven Soviet defectors from the 1950s and three spy penetrations of the Soviet system until 1961.

The 1960s were a golden decade for counterintelligence, Mr. Rocca said, “because at no time in the history of Soviet intelligence and counterintelligence have they been hit so hard.”

The successes included neutralizing Soviet spies such as Britain’s MI-6 agent George Blake in 1961 and Philby in 1963, and British civil servant William Vassall and German intelligence official Heinz Felfe in 1964, Rocca said.

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HEADLINE	01/02 Heavily armed man caused panic: illegal?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/02/us/atlanta-gun-laws.html
GIST	<p>ATLANTA — Two days after a gunman killed 10 people at a Colorado grocery store, leaving many Americans on high alert, Rico Marley was arrested as he emerged from the bathroom at a Publix supermarket in Atlanta. He was wearing body armor and carrying six loaded weapons — four handguns in his jacket pockets, and in a guitar bag, a semiautomatic rifle and a 12-gauge shotgun.</p> <p>Moments earlier, an Instacart delivery driver had alerted a store employee after seeing Mr. Marley in the bathroom, along with the AR-15-style rifle, which was propped against a wall. A grand jury indictment later described what had come next: “panic, terror and the evacuation of the Publix.”</p> <p>Mr. Marley, then 22, was arrested without incident that day in March 2021. His lawyer, Charles Brant, noted that he had not made any threats or fired any shots, and had legally purchased his guns. Mr. Marley did not violate Georgia law, Mr. Brant said; he was “just being a person, doing what he had the right to do.”</p>

Indeed, Mr. Marley's arrest kicked off a long and as yet unresolved legal odyssey in which the criminal justice system waffled over what it could charge him with and whether to set him free. Clearly, visiting the grocery store with a trove of guns had frightened people. But was it illegal?

The episode, and others like it, speaks to a uniquely American quandary: In states with permissive gun laws, the police and prosecutors have limited tools at their disposal when a heavily armed individual's mere presence in a public space sows fear or even panic.

The question of how to handle such situations has been raised most often in recent years in the context of [political protests](#), where the open display of weapons has led to concerns about intimidation, the squelching of free speech or worse. But it may become a more frequent subject of debate in the wake of a [landmark Supreme Court decision](#) in June, which expanded Americans' right to arm themselves in public while limiting states' ability to set their own regulations.

The ruling also affirmed the principle of allowing states and local governments to ban guns in "sensitive places"; as examples, it cited legislative assemblies, polling places and courthouses. But the high court left much open for interpretation. "A wave of litigation is going to confront the courts with questions about what, for example, makes a restriction on guns in schools and government buildings different than in museums or on public transit," Jacob D. Charles, a professor and gun law expert at Pepperdine Caruso School of Law, [wrote](#) in a recent blog post.

Events like the one involving Mr. Marley, while difficult to quantify, are extreme examples of a problem already bedeviling the police and prosecutors, sometimes from the moment an armed person is spotted in public. All but three states allow for the open carry of handguns, long guns or both, and in many there is little the police can do.

Chuck Wexler, the executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum, a bipartisan law enforcement policy group, said police officers sometimes had mere seconds to determine whether a person with a gun "either legally has the right or he's a madman" — or both.

"For the average cop walking the street in America, it's a huge dilemma, knowing there have been countless active shooter situations," Mr. Wexler said.

Prosecutors initially went all in on Mr. Marley's case, charging him with 11 felonies: five counts of criminal attempt to commit a felony and six counts of possession of a weapon "during commission of or attempt to commit certain felonies." An arresting officer said in an affidavit that when Mr. Marley had put on his antiballistic armor in the Publix bathroom and placed the handguns, with rounds in the chambers, into his pockets, he had taken a "substantial step of the crime of aggravated assault," a felony.

In July 2021, Judge Debbie-Ann Rickman of Fulton County Magistrate Court denied Mr. Marley bond, determining that he posed a "significant danger to the community."

But court records show that the charges were dismissed in February. Mr. Marley was released from jail after 10 months, only to be rebooked in May, this time after being indicted by a grand jury on 10 lesser counts of reckless conduct, a misdemeanor. The indictment says that Mr. Marley was "loading and displaying" his AR-15 in the restroom and that he left it unattended.

He pleaded not guilty to the charges in August and remains in custody. (Mr. Brant, his lawyer, said he had not filed a new bond motion on his client's behalf because Mr. Marley was homeless and did not have family or friends to stay with.)

John R. Monroe, a defense lawyer and the vice president of a gun-rights group called Georgia Second Amendment, is not involved in Mr. Marley's case. But from the outside, he said, it seems baseless.

“I mean, all the guy did was be in the store with guns,” he said. “I go into Kroger with a gun, and I don’t expect to be arrested for reckless conduct when I do that. Based on the information from the case, he didn’t do anything that would even remotely constitute reckless conduct. And shame on the state for even prosecuting him for that.”

Taking out the rifle in the men’s room would have most likely violated the law in Illinois, Florida and California, where open carry is banned, Mr. Charles said. But states with more lenient gun laws have struggled with scenarios similar to the one involving Mr. Marley.

In February, a man named Guido Herrera was discovered at the Galleria mall in Houston, a few yards from a youth dance competition, wearing a spiked leather mask and carrying a Bible and an AR-15-style rifle. An off-duty police officer working as a security guard was alerted to his presence and tackled him. Mr. Herrera was found to have more than 120 rounds of ammunition with him, as well as a semiautomatic handgun holstered in his waistband.

He was charged with disorderly conduct, a misdemeanor that under Texas law includes knowingly displaying a firearm in public “in a manner calculated to alarm.” A jury found him guilty, and he was given a six-month jail sentence.

Prosecutors were openly frustrated. “His circumstance kind of fell in the gaps,” Barbara Mousset, a lawyer with the Harris County District Attorney’s office, said at Mr. Herrera’s sentencing, according to The Houston Chronicle. “He took advantage of some technicalities in the law — he had the right to have that firearm and, ultimately, this was the only charge that we could get him on.”

In an interview, Armen Merjanian, a lawyer for Mr. Herrera, called his client “a proud owner of firearms living in Texas,” adding that Mr. Herrera brought the rifle into the mall because he was worried about it being stolen from his car.

Nathan Beedle, the misdemeanor trial bureau chief in the Harris County prosecutor’s office, pointed to the practical challenges of applying the legal standard. “How long does it take to go from ‘in a manner calculated to alarm’ to deadly conduct?” said Mr. Beedle, who helped handle the Herrera case. “A millisecond, right?”

Not all such cases have ended peacefully. In 2015, a woman in Colorado Springs called 911 after seeing a man in her neighborhood with a gun. The dispatcher reportedly explained to her that Colorado was an open-carry state. Within minutes, the man went on a shooting spree, killing three people.

Mr. Brant, the lawyer for Mr. Marley, said his client might suffer from mental illness and was awaiting a formal diagnosis. He said Mr. Marley had attempted suicide during his first, 10-month jail stint.

Mr. Brant also offered an explanation for Mr. Marley’s conduct that day: He had acquired the guns and the body armor, Mr. Brant said, because he had felt threatened by someone in his neighborhood. On the day of his arrest, he had hoped to take his guns to a nearby shooting range but first had to run some errands, which included a stop at the grocery store. (Mr. Marley did not have a car, Mr. Brant said, which is why he was carrying the guns around with him.) While in the Publix men’s room, Mr. Brant said, Mr. Marley had taken out some of the weapons, including the rifle, to clean them after discovering that some guacamole he had bought had caused a mess inside the bag.

Charles Russell, the Instacart driver who came upon Mr. Marley in the men’s room, told police that, at one point, he had heard clicking sounds from a stall that “sounded to him like someone was loading firearms,” according to a police report.

In a recent interview, Mr. Russell, 27, said he had the Colorado massacre on his mind at the time. He recalled thinking, “If I don’t do anything, then I’m afraid of what will happen.”

	<p>In a statement to The New York Times, Fani T. Willis, the district attorney in Fulton County, which covers most of Atlanta, said her office had taken a hard look at the case but had not found “provable felonies under Georgia law.”</p> <p>“Georgia’s General Assembly must examine our statutes governing this type of behavior,” added Ms. Willis, a Democrat, referring to the state’s Republican-controlled legislature. “Respecting the right to bear arms should not require that we tolerate people entering public places with assault rifles and body armor.”</p> <p>Mr. Brant said he did not believe anything Mr. Marley had done that day amounted to reckless conduct in a state that has been vigorously pushing the boundaries of the freedom to carry weapons in public. He alluded to a law signed by Gov. Brian Kemp, a Republican, more than a year after Mr. Marley’s arrest that allows people to carry concealed handguns without a license.</p> <p>“What is the definition of reckless conduct?” Mr. Brant said. “Carrying weapons? In a state that requires no permit? And no license? I mean, help me understand, what’s the reckless conduct?”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/02 Climate activists in Germany halt traffic
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/02/world/europe/climate-activists-germany-stop-traffic.html
GIST	<p>The radical climate activists tried hunger strikes. They glued themselves to famous paintings. They tried to disrupt a classical concert. They confronted lawmakers trying to enter Parliament. They even desecrated an official Christmas tree of the city of Berlin.</p> <p>It took them donning neon vests, walking into traffic at rush hour and gluing themselves to the streets in Berlin and Munich, causing miles-long backups and bringing drivers to murderous rage, to make their protest impossible to ignore.</p> <p>With their actions, carried out with increasing frequency as 2022 drew to a close, they have attracted enormous attention in a country where cars reign supreme, home to BMW, Mercedes, Volkswagen and the autobahn. But they have also united almost everyone in politics in Berlin, and much of the public, against them.</p> <p>They have become a target for conservatives and embarrassment for the governing Green Party, which has long been working within the political system toward the same goals. And their tactics have stirred debate even within the broader environmentalist movement over how much is too much in pursuit of climate goals.</p> <p>The answer from the protesters, who are the German chapter of an environmental group called Last Generation, is that the climate crisis warrants drastic action. Founded in 2021 when a small number of activists went on a weekslong hunger strike in front of the Parliament building in Berlin, the group is now well-funded and has since grown to include a few hundred active members, whose actions have earned, among other things, a reference in the president’s Christmas speech last week — a sign that their protests have struck a nerve.</p> <p>Their immediate demands — things like ending food waste, enforcing strict speed limits to reduce emissions and subsidizing rail travel — may seem tame, but their ultimate message is urgent: The world is in a climate emergency and business as usual is not an option.</p> <p>“They mix claims really easy to implement, majority-winning policy claims — things that are quite accessible for a majority of the population — with a system criticism,” said Daniel Saldivia Gonzatti, who studies protests at WZB Berlin Social Science Center. “It’s effective.”</p> <p>And enraging. Friedrich Merz, the head of the conservative opposition, called Last Generation a criminal organization and wants the authorities to test whether it could be declared illegal. Another politician, Alexander Dobrindt, the parliamentary leader of the Bavarian conservative party, compared the group to</p>

the Red Army Faction, a notorious band of left-wing terrorists who robbed, murdered and kidnapped in the 1970s.

“The government has ignored over one million people on the streets in Germany alone and the government is ignoring scientists,” said Carla Rochel, a 20-year-old student who was one of the early members of Last Generation, referring to Fridays for Future, a series of peaceful protests that peaked before the pandemic. “That’s why we decided to take to the streets and simply not go away anymore.”

The mass-market daily Bild has called the traffic-stopping protesters “climate hacks” and has published unflattering portrayals of individual participants. In some states the legal system has gone into overdrive: Bavaria locked up more than a dozen Last Generation members preventively for days, and elsewhere state prosecutors raided the activists’ homes and confiscated personal electronics while investigating whether the group constitutes a “criminal gang.”

For group members, who besides being committed are also often well-spoken and photogenic, the negative attention has worked in their favor to an extent, giving them a prominent place in the German news media, including on televised debate shows alongside powerful politicians.

“From being called terrorists to sitting with the justice minister in a talk show in the span of the week is quite a measure of success,” said Mr. Saldivia Gonzatti, the academic studying protests.

The group has drawn criticism even in environmental circles over whether its more extreme actions, which are also being used by climate activists in countries like Britain, may be backfiring and are becoming a distraction that is turning people off from the climate cause.

Luisa Neubauer, a prominent member of the Fridays for Future climate movement, said that while the group’s reason for blocking traffic was legitimate, she worried that the public had become so focused on the activists that the problem of climate change had become less visible.

In much German public debate, she said, “The question has become ‘How do you stand on the Last Generation?’ and not ‘How do you stand on the climate crisis?’”

On a recent and exceedingly chilly and damp weekday morning, six protesters from Last Generation walked into a crosswalk on a busy road leading to the storied Potsdamer Platz, one of downtown Berlin’s most traffic-jam-prone spots, and unfurled banners and then little rubber seating mats.

After a second’s pause, they sat down in unison and with seemingly choreographed motion each began gluing one of their hands to the wet pavement.

Within seconds, drivers starting honking and trying to go around the protesters onto the median. Within minutes, the police arrived and tried to pull away the protesters. Because the pavement was wet, the officers managed to pull four of the activists onto the sidewalk — two more could not be budged and a special unit had to be dispatched dissolve the glue using oil and solvents.

“One of the scariest moments is when the cars start rolling toward you, pushing themselves through people as though they don’t intend to stop,” said Irma Trommer, 26, who has taken part in similar human road blocks dozens of times.

Not everyone thinks their form of activism is productive.

“It annoys me, maybe that’s embarrassing,” said Renate Künast, a Green Party stalwart and former federal minister, who has spent nearly two decades in federal politics. Democracy is a process, she said, and even in her position she can’t make climate dominate the conversation in Parliament.

The activists gained a new level of infamy in November when a cyclist in Berlin died after being pinned by a cement mixer during one of the group’s traffic jams.

Early reports suggested the woman could have survived if a specialized emergency vehicle could have made it through the backup. Reaction was swift, with many condemning the activist group. It later turned out that a doctor on site had already decided on a different course of action that did not require the traffic-bound emergency vehicle.

“Now at the latest we should say goodbye to the fairy tale of the harmless protest,” the speaker of a powerful police union said at the time.

Polls taken just after the accident found that 80 percent of Germans were critical of the group’s action and 86 percent thought the actions ended up hurting the cause of fighting climate change.

The notoriety has only galvanized the group, whose numbers have grown from just a couple of dozen in the summer to hundreds of activists and supporters. In December the group was blocking traffic in Berlin on three to four mornings a week, sometimes at multiple locations.

“The future I personally am heading for, if climate policy does not change, is so much more uncertain than anything I am taking on here,” said Ms. Trommer, referring to not just the very real possibility of violence she faces from frustrated drivers, but a permanent criminal record she could walk away with.

“My hope is that by showing that I’m willing to risk myself doing these actions, how crazy threatening the global situation is for people of my age,” she said, rubbing her hand, which was torn off the pavement by a policeman before the glue had set.

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HEADLINE	01/02 Russia’s war worsens global starvation
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/02/us/politics/russia-ukraine-food-crisis.html
GIST	<p>ISTANBUL — Hulking ships carrying Ukrainian wheat and other grains are backed up along the Bosphorus here in Istanbul as they await inspections before moving on to ports around the world.</p> <p>The number of ships sailing through this narrow strait, which connects Black Sea ports to wider waters, plummeted when Russia invaded Ukraine 10 months ago and imposed a naval blockade. Under diplomatic pressure, Moscow has begun allowing some vessels to pass, but it continues to restrict most shipments from Ukraine, which together with Russia once exported a quarter of the world’s wheat.</p> <p>And at the few Ukrainian ports that are operational, Russia’s missile and drone attacks on Ukraine’s energy grid periodically cripple the grain terminals where wheat and corn are loaded onto ships.</p> <p>An enduring global food crisis has become one of the farthest-reaching consequences of Russia’s war, contributing to widespread starvation, poverty and premature deaths.</p> <p>The United States and allies are struggling to reduce the damage. American officials are organizing efforts to help Ukrainian farmers get food out of their country through rail and road networks that connect to Eastern Europe and on barges traveling up the Danube River.</p> <p>But as deep winter sets in and Russia presses assaults on Ukraine’s infrastructure, the crisis is worsening. Food shortages are already being exacerbated by a drought in the Horn of Africa and unusually harsh weather in other parts of the world.</p> <p>The United Nations World Food Program estimates that more than 345 million people are suffering from or at risk of acute food insecurity, more than double the number from 2019.</p> <p>“We’re dealing now with a massive food insecurity crisis,” Antony J. Blinken, the U.S. secretary of state, said last month at a summit with African leaders in Washington. “It’s the product of a lot of things, as we all know,” he said, “including Russia’s aggression against Ukraine.”</p>

The food shortages and high prices are causing intense pain across Africa, Asia and the Americas. U.S. officials are especially worried about Afghanistan and Yemen, which have been [ravaged by war](#). Egypt, Lebanon and other big food-importing nations are finding it difficult to pay their debts and other expenses because costs have surged. Even in wealthy countries like the [United States](#) and [Britain](#), soaring inflation driven in part by the war's disruptions has left poorer people without enough to eat.

“By attacking Ukraine, the breadbasket of the world, Putin is attacking the world's poor, spiking global hunger when people are already on the brink of famine,” said Samantha Power, the administrator of the United States Agency for International Development, or USAID.

Ukrainians are likening the events to the [Holodomor](#), when Joseph Stalin engineered a famine in Soviet-ruled Ukraine 90 years ago that killed millions.

Mr. Blinken announced on Dec. 20 that the U.S. government would begin granting blanket exceptions to its economic sanctions programs worldwide to ensure that food aid and other assistance kept flowing. The action is intended to ensure that companies and organizations do not withhold assistance for fear of running afoul of U.S. sanctions.

State Department officials said it was the most significant change to U.S. sanctions policy in years. The United Nations Security Council adopted a similar resolution on sanctions last month.

But Russia's intentional disruption of global food supplies poses an entirely different problem.

Moscow has restricted its own exports, increasing costs elsewhere. Most important, it has stopped sales of fertilizer, needed by the world's farmers. Before the war, Russia was the biggest exporter of fertilizer.

Its hostilities in Ukraine have also had a major impact. From March to November, Ukraine exported an average of 3.5 million metric tons of grains and oilseeds per month, a steep drop from the five million to seven million metric tons per month it exported before the war began in February, according to [data from the country's Ministry of Agrarian Policy and Food](#).

That number would be even lower if not for an agreement forged in July by the United Nations, Turkey, Russia and Ukraine, called the [Black Sea Grain Initiative](#), in which Russia agreed to allow exports from three Ukrainian seaports.

Russia continues to block seven of the 13 ports used by Ukraine. (Ukraine has 18 ports, but five are in Crimea, which Russia seized in 2014.) Besides the three on the Black Sea, three on the Danube are operational.

The initial deal was only for four months but was extended in November for another four months. When Russia threatened to leave it in October, global food prices surged five to six percent, said Isobel Coleman, a deputy administrator at USAID.

“The effects of this war are hugely, hugely disruptive,” she said. “Putin is pushing millions of people into poverty.”

While increases in the price of food this past year have been particularly sharp in the Middle East, North Africa and South America, no region has been immune.

“You're looking at price increases of everything from 60 percent in the U.S. to 1900 percent in Sudan,” said Sara Menker, the chief executive of Gro Intelligence, a platform for climate and agriculture data that tracks food prices.

Before the war, food prices had already climbed to their highest levels in over a decade because of pandemic disruptions in the supply chain and pervasive drought.

The United States, Brazil and Argentina, key grain producers for the world, have experienced three consecutive years of drought. The level of the Mississippi River fell so much that the barges that carry American grain to ports were temporarily grounded.

The weakening of many foreign currencies against the U.S. dollar has also forced some countries to buy less food on the international market than in years past.

“There were a lot of structural issues, and then the war just made it that much worse,” Ms. Menker said.

U.S. officials say the Russian military has deliberately targeted grain storage facilities in Ukraine, a potential war crime, and has destroyed wheat processing plants.

Many farmers in Ukraine have gone to war or fled their land, and the infrastructure that processed and carried wheat and sunflower oil to foreign markets has broken down.

At a farm 190 miles south of Kyiv, 40 of the 350 employees have enlisted in the army. And the farm is struggling with other shortages. Kees Huizinga, the Dutch co-owner, said Russia’s attacks on the energy grid have led to the shutdown of a plant that provides his farm and others with nitrogen fertilizer.

Other fertilizer plants in Europe were forced to shut down or slow production last year as natural gas prices soared, a result of the war. Natural gas is critical for fertilizer production.

“So this year’s harvest has already been reduced,” Mr. Huizinga said in November. “And if Russians continue like this, next year’s harvest might even be worse.”

He added that transportation costs have risen sharply for farmers in Ukraine.

Before the war, farmers shipped out 95 percent of the country’s wheat and grain exports through the Black Sea. Mr. Huizinga’s farm paid \$23 to \$24 per ton to transport its products to ports and onto ships. Now, the cost has more than doubled, he said. And an alternative route — by truck to Romania — costs \$85 per ton.

Mr. Huizinga said Russia’s compromise on Black Sea shipments has helped, but he suspects Moscow is hobbling operations by slowing inspections.

Under the arrangement, each vessel leaving one of three Ukrainian ports on the Black Sea has to be inspected by joint teams of Ukrainian, Russian, Turkish and United Nations employees once the ship reaches Istanbul.

The teams look for any unauthorized cargo or crew members, and vessels heading to Ukraine need to be empty of cargo, said Ismini Palla, a spokeswoman for the U.N. office overseeing the program.

U.N. data shows that the rate of inspections has dropped in recent weeks. The parties agreed to deploy three teams each day, Ms. Palla said, adding that the United Nations has requested more.

“We hope that this will change soon, so that the Ukrainian ports can operate again at higher capacity,” she said. “Ukrainian exports remain a vital element in combating global food insecurity.”

Ms. Palla said the parties’ decision in November to extend the agreement contributed to a 2.8 percent drop in global wheat prices.

Over the last six months, food prices have retreated from highs reached this spring, according to an index compiled by the United Nations. But they remain much higher than in previous years.

An uncertainty for farmers this winter is the soaring price of fertilizer, one of their biggest costs.

Farmers have passed on the higher cost by increasing the price of food products. And many farmers are using less fertilizer in their fields. That will result in lower crop yields in the coming seasons, pushing food prices higher.

Subsistence farms, which produce nearly a third of the world's food, are being hit even harder, Ms. Coleman said.

In a communiqué issued at the close of their meeting in Bali, Indonesia, in November, leaders of the Group of 20 nations said they were deeply concerned by the challenges to global food security and pledged to support the international efforts to keep food supply chains functioning.

"We need to strengthen trade cooperation, not weaken it," Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the director general of the World Trade Organization, said at the summit.

The U.S. government spends about \$2 billion per year on global food security, and it started a program called Feed the Future after the last big food crisis, in 2010, that now encompasses 20 countries.

Since the start of the Ukraine war, the United States has provided more than \$11 billion to address the food crisis. That includes a \$100 million program called AGRI-Ukraine, which has helped about 13,000 farmers in Ukraine — 27 percent of the total — gain access to financing, technology, transportation, seeds, fertilizer, bags and mobile storage units, Ms. Coleman said.

The efforts could help rebuild the country while alleviating the global food crisis — one-fifth of Ukraine's economy is in the agriculture sector, and a fifth of the country's labor force is connected to it.

"It's hugely important for Ukraine's economy," she said, "and for Ukraine's economic survival."

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HEADLINE	01/01 Putin New Year's message from critics
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/01/world/europe/putin-critics-russia-new-year-messages.html
GIST	<p>There are now so many jailed opponents of President Vladimir V. Putin and his full-scale invasion of Ukraine that a new tradition has emerged in Russia: New Year's greetings from political prisoners.</p> <p>Aleksei A. Navalny, the prominent opposition leader who has been behind bars since early 2021, said that he had received so many seasonal decorations in letters from supporters that he hung them up in his cell at his prison outside Moscow. An hour later, the warden took them down, "but the feeling remained," he said.</p> <p>Mr. Navalny's treatment in prison has worsened, including repeated stints in solitary confinement, but he still receives visits from lawyers and is able to get messages out to his supporters.</p> <p>"The calamity that has befallen our country has brought all normal, honest people closer together, and it's not surprising that a connection appears between them," Mr. Navalny wrote in a post on Instagram on Saturday, thanking his supporters. "I can feel it."</p> <p>The Putin critics' New Year's messages are a counterprogramming of sorts to the traditional year-end speech from the president, who delivered his address on New Year's Eve surrounded by men and women in uniform. Mr. Putin vowed to continue his onslaught against Ukraine, asserting that "moral and historical righteousness is on our side."</p> <p>Ilya Yashin, an anti-Kremlin activist and politician who was sentenced to eight and a half years in prison in December for "spreading false information" about atrocities committed in the Ukrainian city of Bucha by Russian troops, wrote on Friday that he had been transferred to a jail in Izhevsk, a city 600 miles east of Moscow.</p>

	<p>“I’m OK, friends,” Mr. Yashin wrote. “I want to remind you that the criminal war against Ukraine must be stopped, that Putin must go, and that Russia must be free and happy.” He added his address in jail to the message, reminding his supporters that they could write to him through the Russian penitentiary system’s online service.</p> <p>Mediazona, an independent Russian news outlet, published an article on Saturday collecting New Year’s greetings from political prisoners. Aleksei Gorinov, a Moscow lawmaker sentenced in July to seven years in prison for denouncing the war, wrote that he remained “an optimist who believes in man” because “in Russia there is no other way to live,” and wished for an end “to this useless, crazy war.”</p> <p>Vladimir Kara-Murza, an activist and journalist under investigation for treason, also struck an optimistic note, though he faces as long as 20 years in prison. “The past year became one of the darkest in the memory of living generations,” Mr. Kara-Murza wrote. “But the dawn comes after even the darkest night — and it will definitely come.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/01 Croatia fully integrated EU member
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/croatia-europe-yugoslavia-european-union-government-7b58ad627de470eaedc7b2c7c41e12ce
GIST	<p>ZAGREB, Croatia (AP) — At the stroke of midnight on Saturday, Croatia switched to the shared European currency, the euro, and removed dozens of border checkpoints to join the world’s largest passport-free travel area.</p> <p>It marked a fresh start for the small Balkan nation of 4 million people that captured international attention three decades ago as the site of a brutal war that left nearly a quarter of its economy in ruins.</p> <p>Joining Europe’s ID-check-free Schengen zone means Croats will now be among almost 420 million people who are free to roam its 27 member countries without passports for work or leisure.</p> <p>Adopting the euro will likewise offer Croatia the benefits stemming from deeper financial ties with the currency’s 19 other users and with the European Central Bank. It will also make traveling and doing business easier, removing the hassle of currency exchange for Croats going abroad and for tens of thousands of tourists who visit their country each year for work or to enjoy its stunning Adriatic coastline.</p> <p>As revelers around Croatia took to the streets to ring in the New Year, the country’s interior minister, Davor Bozinovic, was at the Bregana border crossing with Slovenia to wish the best of luck to the last travelers to have their passports checked there.</p> <p>Slovenia has been a part of the Schengen zone and tasked with safeguarding its external frontier since 2007.</p> <p>Now, the task will be taken over by Croatia, which will continue to apply strict border controls on its eastern borders with non-EU neighbors Bosnia, Serbia and Montenegro.</p> <p>“We opened our doors to borderless Europe. This goes beyond eliminating border controls, it is the final affirmation of our European identity,” Bozinovic said after watching the ramps at the Bregana border crossing being lifted for the final time in the company of his Slovenian counterpart Sanja Ajanovic-Hovnik.</p> <p>Stipica Mandic, a 72-year-old professional driver, shared the sentiment and said the freedom of movement without long waits at border crossings was his personal dream and the reason why he left a New Year’s Eve party at his home and drove 20 kilometers (12.4 miles) to Bregana to see it come true.</p>

	<p>“I spent years of my life waiting at border checkpoints, so I came here tonight to witness this moment, the moment after which I will wait no more,” he said.</p> <p>At about the same time, shortly after midnight, Croatia’s finance minister and central bank governor walked to an ATM in the capital, Zagreb, to withdraw euro banknotes and symbolically relegate Croatia’s old national currency, the kuna, to history.</p> <p>Croatia joined the EU in 2013, but to adopt the euro the country had to fulfil a set of strict economic conditions, including having a stable exchange rate, controlled inflation and sound public spending.</p> <p>The Croatian kuna and the euro will be in dual use for cash payments for only 14 days, but as people shop post-holiday in January they will receive only euros in change.</p> <p>The New Year’s Eve developments were described by many Croats as proof their country has completed a difficult journey to the European mainstream 31 years after it fought a war for independence from Serb-dominated Yugoslavia in which 20,000 people were killed and hundreds of thousands displaced.</p> <p>“We used to dream about this and I am happy that we lived to see it happen,” said Zlatko Leko, a resident of the port city of Split in the country’s south. “I hope this means we are finally a part of Europe.”</p> <p>Elenmari Pletikos-Solon in Zagreb agreed: “We have already been a part of Europe, but dismantling the borders and switching to the euro is the final confirmation that we are fully integrated” with the European Union.</p> <p>“I am truly happy. It will make many things in our life much easier,” she added.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/01 China travelers face Covid restrictions
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/politics-health-covid-19-pandemic-china-disease-outbreaks-b737daff7bc8da5a79c8b306395d1995
GIST	<p>BEIJING (AP) — Australia and Canada have joined a growing list of countries requiring travelers from China to take a COVID-19 test prior to boarding their flight, as China battles a nationwide outbreak of the coronavirus after abruptly easing restrictions that were in place for much of the pandemic.</p> <p>Australian health authorities said Sunday that from Jan 5, all air travelers from mainland China, Hong Kong or Macao will need to show a negative COVID-19 test taken within two days of their departure.</p> <p>Canadian authorities announced similar measures that will also come into effect Jan. 5 in a statement dated Saturday — a move experts say isn’t very effective.</p> <p>Kerry Bowman, assistant professor at the University of Toronto’s Temerty Faculty of Medicine, said the requirement is “not based on science at this point.”</p> <p>“This isn’t the early days of the pandemic,” he said. “It’s pretty clear that point-of-entry screening is not very effective at all. Often people can test positive days and weeks later.”</p> <p>Dr. Isaac Bogoch, associate professor at University of Toronto’s Temerty Faculty of Medicine, said it’s not entirely clear what the policy’s goals are, but such measures have not helped.</p> <p>“We know from the past that very focused and targeted travel measures such as this don’t do much to prevent the spread of COVID, either by importing COVID to Canada, or by the threat of variants of concern in Canada,” he said.</p>

Australia and Canada join other countries including the U.S., U.K., India, Japan and several European nations in imposing tougher COVID-19 measures on Chinese travelers amid [concerns over a lack of data on infections](#) in China and fears of the [possibility that new variants may spread](#).

Research has shown how the virus spreads through human mobility, which means that the next variant of the virus may not even emerge from China, and even if it did, it could land in Canada from other indirect routes, Bowman said, adding that a more effective measure would be testing wastewater from airplanes and airports to check for the viral load and mutations.

Vancouver International Airport said Saturday it would expand its wastewater testing pilot program.

China, which for most of the pandemic adopted a “zero-COVID” strategy that imposed harsh restrictions aimed at stamping out the virus, abruptly eased those measures in December. Chinese authorities previously said that from Jan. 8, overseas travelers would no longer need to quarantine upon arriving in China, paving the way for Chinese residents to travel.

Hong Kong is also preparing for quarantine-free travel to China, with plans to resume operations of more border checkpoints as early as Jan. 8, according to a Facebook post by Hong Kong Chief Secretary Eric Chan.

However, a quota will remain in place limiting the number of travelers between the two places.

“Depending on the first phase of the situation, we will gradually expand the scale for a complete reopening of the border,” Chan said.

In China, eased restrictions meant that residents could celebrate New Year’s in large-scale gatherings that were prohibited for much of the pandemic, even though the country is experiencing a massive outbreak of cases.

“There are still some worries, more or less,” said Wu Yanxia, a 51-year-old Beijing resident who works at a logistic company. “I hope that next year everything will be normal, such as domestic travel.”

Others hope that 2023 will bring better things after a difficult past year.

“We have experienced a very uneven year, particularly unforgettable, with many things out of our imagination,” said Li Feng, a teacher in Beijing, adding that 2022 was a difficult year for both the people and the government.

“But I think we have come through and everything will be fine,” Li said. “All of us will be better, and better in both work and life.”

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HEADLINE	01/01 UK group temp. halts disruptive protests
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/politics-united-kingdom-government-london-climate-and-environment-c90f39884a8fee31ae410da3906fc6e3
GIST	<p>LONDON (AP) — The U.K. division of climate change protest group Extinction Rebellion says its activists would temporarily stop blocking busy roads, gluing themselves to buildings and engaging in other acts of civil disobedience because such methods have not achieved their desired effects.</p> <p>“As we ring in the new year, we make a controversial resolution to temporarily shift away from public disruption as a primary tactic,” the group said in a New Year’s Eve website post. “We recognize and celebrate the power of disruption to raise the alarm and believe that constantly evolving tactics is a necessary approach.”</p>

To further its goals of getting politicians, corporations and the public “to end the fossil fuel era,” the group said it would instead focus on broadening its support with actions such as getting 100,000 people to surround the Houses of Parliament in London on April 21.

“In a time when speaking out and taking action are criminalized, building collective power, strengthening in number and thriving through bridge-building is a radical act,” the website post said. “This year, we prioritize attendance over arrest and relationships over roadblocks, as we stand together and become impossible to ignore.”

In response to protests by Extinction Rebellion and other direct-action groups, Britain’s Conservative government last year toughened police powers to shut down disruptive protests and increased penalties for obstructing roads, which can now bring a prison sentence.

Even tougher moves were rejected by Parliament, but the government planned to try again to pass a law that would make it a criminal offense to interfere with infrastructure. Civil liberties groups have decried the moves as restrictions on free speech and the right to protest.

In the four years since Extinction Rebellion formed, the group has attracted both praise and criticism with climate demonstrations that were [designed to be disruptive](#) and often led to mass arrests while succeeding in snarling road and port traffic.

In April, British police said six people were arrested after activists climbed onto an oil tanker and [blocked four London bridges](#) to protest investments in fossil fuel. Extinction Rebellion said at the time that two former British Olympic athletes, gold medal-winning canoeist Etienne Stott and sailor Laura Baldwin, were among the protesters.

In its Sunday post titled “We Quit,” the U.K. branch of Extinction Rebellion said that while the group has helped bring about “a seismic shift” in the climate conversation, “very little has changed. Emissions continue to rise and our planet is dying at an accelerated rate.”

The group said it thinks a confluence of multiple crises made it the right time to try a new approach. In its announcement about the April protest, it said, “Surrounding the Houses of Parliament day after day in large numbers means we can leave the locks, glue and paint behind.”

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HEADLINE	01/02 Israel missile strike hits Damascus airport
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/politics-syria-government-israel-damascus-b82d775318e74fd2f70305b140fa3e15
GIST	<p>BEIRUT (AP) — Israel’s military fired missiles toward the international airport of Syria’s capital early Monday, putting it out of service and killing two soldiers and wounding two others, the Syrian army said.</p> <p>The attack, which occurred shortly after midnight Sunday, was the second in seven months to put the Damascus International Airport out of commission. It caused material damage in a nearby area, the army said, without giving further details.</p> <p>Syria’s Ministry of Transport said work to repair the damage began immediately and later Monday, some flights resumed while work in other parts of the airport continued.</p> <p>Israel has targeted airports and ports in government-held parts of Syria in an apparent attempt to prevent arms shipments from Iran to militant groups backed by Tehran, including Lebanon’s Hezbollah.</p> <p>An opposition war monitor reported the Israeli strikes hit the airport as well as an arms depot close to the facility south of Damascus. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said four people were killed in the strike.</p>

The conflicting reports could not immediately be reconciled.

The Observatory said the runway used for civilian flights was fixed while another, used for cargo transport, remains out of service. That runway is also used by Iran-backed groups, the Observatory added.

Later on Monday, Syria's Foreign Ministry said the strikes are "part of a series of Israeli crimes" targeting Syria. The ministry, in a statement, called on the U.N. Security Council to condemn the "Israeli crimes and aggressions" adding that those responsible should be held accountable and such attacks should not be repeated.

There was no comment from Israel.

Syrian state TV reported that the private Cham Wings resumed flights while the flight-tracking website Flightradar24 showed a flight by Iraq's private Fly Baghdad coming from the Iraqi city of Najaf was about to land shortly around 9 a.m. in Damascus.

On June 10, [Israeli airstrikes that struck Damascus International Airport](#) caused significant damage to infrastructure and runways. It reopened two weeks later after repairs.

In September, Israeli airstrikes [hit the international airport of the northern city of Aleppo](#), Syria's largest and once commercial center, also putting it out of service for days.

In late 2021, [Israeli warplanes fired missiles that struck the port of Latakia](#) hitting containers and igniting a huge fire.

Israel has carried out hundreds of strikes on targets inside government-controlled parts of Syria in recent years, but rarely acknowledges or discusses such operations.

Israel has acknowledged, however, that it targets bases of Iran-allied militant groups, such as Lebanon's Hezbollah, which has sent thousands of fighters to support Syrian President Bashar Assad's forces.

Thousands of Iran-backed fighters have joined Syria's 11-year civil war and helped tip the balance of power in Assad's favor.

Israel says an Iranian presence on its northern frontier is a red line that justifies its strikes on facilities and weapons inside Syria.

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HEADLINE	01/01 Colombia, Venezuela open key bridge
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/politics-colombia-venezuela-government-eb6b3a38102b90cb128e4a8dc6e720cd
GIST	<p>BUCARAMANGA, Colombia (AP) — Colombia and Venezuela on Sunday opened a key bridge linking the countries that had been closed for almost seven years amid political tensions, launching an era of improved relations under Colombia's new leftist president.</p> <p>Delegations led by Colombian trade minister Germán Umaña and the governor of Venezuela's Tachira state, Freddy Bernal, met in the middle of the "Tienditas" bridge linking Tachira and Colombia's Norte de Santander state for the opening ceremony.</p> <p>"From today, all the border crossings are open for transport," said Bernal, adding that the political will existed to continue improving relations between the neighbors.</p> <p>Construction of the bridge ended in 2016, but it was never inaugurated because of the political crisis between the South American countries. The bridge, which cost more than \$32 million to build, was designed to ease congestion on the two other binational bridges in the area and facilitate trade.</p>

In 2019, Venezuela's socialist President Nicolás Maduro ordered more than a dozen cargo containers placed on the bridge to symbolically block it to protest attempts by the opposition to bring humanitarian aid into Venezuela from Colombia.

Diplomatic and commercial relations between Colombia and Venezuela were reestablished in September following the inauguration of Gustavo Petro - a former guerrilla - as Colombia's president.

Petro's predecessor, Iván Duque (2018-2022), had called Maduro a "dictator" and made Colombia one of 50 countries that recognized opposition leader Juan Guaidó as Venezuela's interim president, charging that Maduro's re-election had been fraudulent.

"Tienditas" was the last remaining crossing linking the countries to be reopened along their 2,200-kilometer (1,367-mile) border following the restoration of relations.

"In political terms, 'Tienditas' is the symbol of the recovery of dialogue between the two countries," said Ronal Rodríguez, a researcher at the Venezuela Observatory in Colombia's Universidad del Rosario.

Pedro Benítez, a political analyst and professor at the Central University of Venezuela, told The Associated Press the key symbol of the restoration of relations was the first face-to-face meeting between Petro and Maduro in November.

Benitez said the reestablishment of trade relations between the neighbors so far has been "very bumpy" because incoming Colombian products have been very expensive due to "non-institutional obstacles attributed to Venezuelan officials."

The resumption of commercial ties began with the enabling of traffic across the Simón Bolívar and Francisco de Paula Santander bridges in September. From then until November, 385 trucks passed over the bridges, most from Colombia into Venezuela carrying products such as medical supplies, fiber optics, textiles, toilet paper and cardboard. Coiled steel, motors and pipes were transported from Venezuela into Colombia.

Between January and October 2022, total trade between the two countries reached \$512 million, an increase from \$394 million in all of 2021, but still a long ways from the \$7 billion in bilateral trade seen in 2008.

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HEADLINE	01/02 Some in China return to regular activity
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/china/some-china-return-regular-activity-after-covid-infections-2023-01-02/
GIST	<p>BEIJING, Jan 2 (Reuters) - Some people in the Chinese cities of Beijing, Shanghai and Wuhan braved the cold and a rise in COVID-19 infections to return to regular activity on Monday, raising the prospect of a boost to the economy as more recover from infections.</p> <p>Among those who gathered to sled or ice skate on a frozen lake in the capital's Shichahai Lake Park, some were upbeat about the opening-up after China dropped stringent "zero-COVID" measures on Dec. 7 to adopt a strategy of living with the virus.</p> <p>The switch followed protests over the policy championed by President Xi Jinping, marking the strongest show of public defiance in his decade-old presidency and coinciding with grim growth figures for the country's \$17 trillion economy.</p> <p>However, a wave of infections has erupted nationwide since the dismantling of the zero-COVID policy, fuelling international concern and prompting some countries to impose curbs on travellers from China.</p>

"After the end of this lockdown, we don't have to scan the health code any more, nor do we have to check the travel code," said one of those in the park, Yang, who gave only one name.

"So we are free now."

Also at the lake was Zhong, a 22-year-old college student, who said he had stayed home for two or three weeks after getting infected.

"Now I can go out and it's good timing for the New Year's Day holiday," he said. "I want to go around in Beijing, have a look and feel the festive mood."

Monday was a public holiday but traffic in the capital has built up again in the last few days as people flock to outdoor sites, although business is still slow in some smaller, confined locations, such as restaurants.

The owner of a Beijing seafood restaurant said patrons had not returned to full strength.

"I expect this situation to linger through the Lunar New Year holiday," said Chen, who gave only his surname. "I am counting on business to be more normal after the holiday."

In the central city of Wuhan, where the pandemic began three years ago, people were not as anxious any more, a man surnamed Wu told Reuters.

"Work production, life and entertainment are all getting back to normal levels," said Wu, a tutor at a private training centre.

During the New Year's holiday period, 52.7 million domestic tourist trips were made, an increase of 0.44% over the same period a year earlier and up 42.8% over the corresponding period in 2019, according to government data posted on Monday.

LUNAR NEW YEAR TRAVEL

China's biggest holiday, Lunar New Year, begins on Jan. 21 this year, when the railway network is expected to carry 5.5 million passengers, state broadcaster CCTV has said.

As expectations for holiday travel grow, authorities at Tibet's spectacular Potala Palace said it would open for visitors from Jan 3, after shutting last August due to a COVID-19 outbreak.

Some hotels in the southern tourist resort of Sanya are fully booked for Lunar New Year, media have said. In recent days state media have sought to reassure the public that the COVID-19 outbreak was under control and nearing its peak.

Infections in the cities of Beijing, Guanzhou, Shanghai and Chongqing are close to ending, news outlet Caixin said on Sunday, citing researchers.

But infections will peak in the urban regions of Sichuan, Shaanxi, Gansu and Qinghai in the latter half of January, they added.

More than 80% of those living in southwestern Sichuan have been infected, the province's Center for Disease Control and Prevention has said.

But Monday's single new COVID death - flat from the previous day - among China's population of 1.4 billion does not match the experience of other countries after they re-opened.

The official death toll of 5,250 since the pandemic began compares with more than 1 million in the United States. Chinese-ruled Hong Kong, a city of 7.4 million, has reported more than 11,000 deaths.

	<p>About 9,000 people in China are probably dying each day from COVID, health data firm Airfinity said last week, while cumulative deaths since Dec. 1 have probably reached 100,000, with infections at 18.6 million.</p> <p>Airfinity, which is based in Britain, expects China's COVID cases to reach their first peak on Jan. 13, with 3.7 million daily infections.</p> <p>China has said it only counts deaths of COVID patients caused by pneumonia and respiratory failure as being related to COVID. The relatively low death count is also inconsistent with rising demand reported by funeral parlours in several cities.</p> <p>Qatar on Monday joined a growing list of countries, including the United States, India and others, which have imposed COVID tests for travellers from China over concerns about the scale of the new outbreak and scepticism over Beijing's health statistics.</p> <p>European Union government health officials will hold talks on Wednesday on a coordinated response to the surge in COVID-19 infections in China, the Swedish EU presidency said on Monday, after December talks concluded with no decisions on the matter.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/02 Philippines airport scrambles; power cut
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-main-airport-scrambles-restore-normalcy-after-power-cut-2023-01-02/
GIST	<p>MANILA, Jan 2 (Reuters) - The Philippines' main gateway scrambled to resume full services on Monday after a New Year power outage jolted its air traffic control and disrupted 300 flights, prompting calls from business leaders and a top senator for urgent action.</p> <p>A failure of primary and secondary power supplies caused the outage at Ninoy Aquino airport, and it should take about 72 hours for airlines to normalise their operations, said Cesar Chiong, general manager of the Manila International Airport Authority.</p> <p>There were 361 flights delayed, cancelled or diverted to other regional airports on Sunday, affecting about 65,000 passengers, while many other flights were rerouted around Philippine airspace.</p> <p>Chiong said the airport was handling a maximum of 15 flights per hour on Monday morning, down from the usual 20.</p> <p>Several of the airport's four terminals were crowded on Monday, with long queues of people trying to re-book flights while other weary passengers slept on chairs or on the floor.</p> <p>"In the 24 hours that we've been waiting, we are now very exhausted from lack of sleep, my body is aching from all the waiting," said Kirana Mangkabong, 32, an overseas worker.</p> <p>The airport has been ranked among the world's worst international gateways, with flight backlogs a regular occurrence and a history of upgrades being delayed or abandoned due to disputes between airport authorities and contractors.</p> <p>Airports are being built in provinces surrounding Manila to relieve pressure, including in Cavite and in Bulacan, which is due to start operations in 2027.</p> <p>The transport ministry has ruled out sabotage but vowed to investigate the airport chaos, which has renewed calls for existing gateway to be upgraded and better operated.</p>

	<p>"The government should look at this wake up call to improve, either through public or private efforts, or a joint venture," George Barcelon, president of the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry, told Reuters.</p> <p>His flight from Dubai was affected, as was that of tycoon Manuel Pangilinan, who on Sunday said his flight from Japan had to turn back halfway through and tweeted: "Only in the PH. Sigh".</p> <p>Grace Poe, a former presidential candidate and head of the public services committee, called for a congressional inquiry into the incident, saying it was "a national security concern".</p> <p>Airport general manager Chiong said that the facility had introduced its own power system in 2018 but that on Sunday, both the main and backup systems failed.</p> <p>Once connected directly to the regular commercial electricity, the systems experienced a power surge that forced equipment to shut down, including radar and communications, he said.</p> <p>Joey Concepcion, a government business adviser, said authorities should revive a proposal for a consortium to modernise the airport.</p> <p>"Any inefficiencies in the airport translate to big losses in business down the line and are felt throughout the country," he said in a statement.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/02 NKorea leader sacks #2 military official
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/north-koreas-kim-sacks-no-2-military-official-2023-01-02/
GIST	<p>SEOUL, Jan 2 (Reuters) - North Korea has sacked Pak Jong Chon, the second most powerful military official after leader Kim Jong Un, state media reported.</p> <p>Pak, vice chairman of the Central Military Commission of the ruling Workers' Party and a secretary of the party's Central Committee, was replaced by Ri Yong Gil at the committee's annual meeting last week, the official KCNA news agency said on Sunday.</p> <p>No reason for the change was given. Pyongyang regularly revamps its leadership and the year-end party gathering has often been used to announce personnel reshuffles and major policy decisions.</p> <p>State television showed Pak sitting in the front row of the podium with his head down during the meeting while other members raised their hands to vote on personnel issues. His seat was later shown unoccupied.</p> <p>He was also absent in photos released on Monday by the official KCNA news agency of Kim's New Year's Day visit to the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun which houses the bodies of his grandfather and father, unlike in October when Pak accompanied Kim on a trip to the palace to mark a party anniversary.</p> <p>The party's Central Military Commission, which is headed by Kim, is considered the country's most powerful military decision-making body, above the defence ministry.</p> <p>Pak's replacement came as Kim called for developing new intercontinental ballistic missiles and a larger nuclear arsenal to counter the United States and South Korea as key to the isolated country's 2023 defence strategy.</p> <p>Pak had rapidly moved up the military ladder from a one-star artillery commander in 2015 to a four-star general in 2020, taking credit for contributing to progress in the country's short-range missile technology.</p> <p>In late 2020, Pak was promoted to the politburo and earned the title of marshal, the highest military rank under Kim, and became a leading voice last November against joint South Korea-U.S. military exercises.</p>

	<p>Like most other top military aides who went through ups and downs repeatedly under Kim, Pak was briefly demoted in mid-2021 after Kim chided some officials for their handling of North Korea's anti-coronavirus policy, before being promoted again months later.</p> <p>Pak's dismissal comes despite Kim mostly lauding the military's advances in weapons development during the meeting, unlike other areas where he pointed out some faults and called for improvement.</p> <p>Oh Gyeong-sup, a fellow at the Korea Institute for National Unification in Seoul, said a recent flare-up in inter-Korea tension over North Korean drones' intrusion into the South could have played a role.</p> <p>Officials in Seoul said South Korea sent three drones across the border in response to the intrusion, but there was no response from the North, which Oh said could mean that it failed to detect the aircraft.</p> <p>"Pak might have taken responsibility for the failure of security operations," Oh said.</p> <p>Ri, Pak's successor, is also a senior military commander who held key positions including chief of the army's general staff and defence minister.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/03 Russia anger grows over deadly strike
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/defiant-ukrainians-cheer-new-year-drones-blasted-skies-2023-01-01/
GIST	<p>KYIV, Jan 3 (Reuters) - Russian nationalists and some lawmakers have demanded punishment for commanders they accused of ignoring dangers as anger grew over the killing of dozens of Russian soldiers in one of the Ukraine war's deadliest strikes.</p> <p>In a rare disclosure, Russia's defence ministry said 63 soldiers were killed on New Year's Eve in a fiery blast that destroyed a temporary barracks in a vocational college in Makiivka, twin city of the Russian-occupied regional capital of Donetsk in eastern Ukraine.</p> <p>Russian critics said the soldiers were being housed alongside an ammunition dump at the site, which the Russian defence ministry said was hit by four rockets fired from U.S.-made HIMARS launchers.</p> <p>The New Year's Eve strike on Makiivka came as Russia was launching what have become nightly waves of drone attacks on Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities.</p> <p>Ukrainian officials said Russia had on Monday struck Ukraine-controlled parts of the Donetsk region, hitting the village of Yakovlivka, the city of Kramatorsk and destroying an ice rink in the town of Druzhkivka.</p> <p>Ukraine said the Russian death toll in Makiivka was in the hundreds, though pro-Russian officials called that an exaggeration.</p> <p>Russian military bloggers said the extent of the destruction was a result of storing ammunition in the same building as a barracks, despite commanders knowing it was within range of Ukrainian rockets.</p> <p>Igor Girkin, a former commander of pro-Russian troops in eastern Ukraine who is now one of the highest profile Russian nationalist military bloggers, said hundreds had been killed or wounded. Ammunition had been stored at the site and military equipment there was uncammouflaged, he said.</p> <p>"What happened in Makiivka is horrible," wrote Archangel Spetznaz Z, a Russian military blogger with more than 700,000 followers on the Telegram messaging app.</p> <p>"Who came up with the idea to place personnel in large numbers in one building, where even a fool understands that even if they hit with artillery, there will be many wounded or dead?" he wrote.</p>

Commanders "couldn't care less", he said.

Ukraine almost never publicly claims responsibility for attacks on Russian-controlled territory in Ukraine and [President Volodymyr Zelenskiy](#) did not address the Makiivka strike in his nightly speech on Monday.

But the General Staff of Ukraine's Armed Forces reported the Makiivka attack as "a strike on Russian manpower and military equipment". It did not mention casualties, but said 10 pieces of military equipment were destroyed.

'STUPID LOSSES'

The fury in Russia extended to lawmakers.

Grigory Karasin, a member of the Russian Senate and former deputy foreign minister, not only demanded vengeance against Ukraine and its NATO supporters but also "an exacting internal analysis".

Sergei Mironov, a legislator and former chairman of the Senate, Russia's upper house, demanded criminal liability for the officials who had "allowed the concentration of military personnel in an unprotected building" and "all the higher authorities who did not provide the proper level of security".

Unverified footage posted online of the aftermath of the blast at the Russian barracks in Makiivka showed a huge building reduced to smoking rubble.

Some of the dead came from the southwestern Russian region of Samara, the region's governor told Russian media, urging concerned relatives to contact recruitment centres for information.

Andrey Medvedev, deputy speaker of the Moscow City Duma and a pro-Kremlin journalist, said authorities, whether civilian or military, must value Russian lives.

"Either a person is of the highest value – and then punish for stupid losses of personnel, as for treason to the fatherland – or the country is over," Medvedev wrote on the Telegram messaging app.

A Russian-backed military information centre in the Donetsk region said there had been 69 Ukrainian attacks on the region, including Makiivka, on Monday.

'BANKING ON EXHAUSTION'

Having suffered defeats on the battlefield in the second half of 2022, Russia resorted to mass air strikes against Ukrainian cities.

Ukraine said on Monday it had shot down all 39 drones Russia had launched in a third night of air strikes on civilian targets in Kyiv and other cities.

Ukrainian officials said their success proved that Russia's tactic in recent months of raining down missiles and drones to knock out Ukraine's energy infrastructure was increasingly failing as Kyiv beefs up its air defences.

Russia denies targeting civilians in what it calls a special military operation against its southern neighbour launched on Feb. 24.

After firing dozens of missiles on Dec. 31, Russia launched more than 80 Iranian-made Shahed drones on Jan. 1 and Jan. 2, all of which had been shot down, Zelenskiy said, adding that Russia was planning a protracted campaign of such attacks to "exhaust" Ukraine.

"It is probably banking on exhaustion. Exhausting our people, our anti-aircraft defences, our energy," Zelenskiy said in his nightly video address.

	Ukraine, he said, had to "act and do everything so that the terrorists' fail in their aim, as all their others have failed".
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HEADLINE	01/01 REAL ID delayed again: May 2025
SOURCE	https://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/news/2022/12/05/real-id-enforcement-delayed/10838083002/
GIST	<p>The Department of Homeland Security announced Monday that the Real ID deadline would be extended another two years, delaying implementation until May 7, 2025. The law was previously set to come into effect on May 3.</p> <p>"The extension is necessary, in part, to address the lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the ability to obtain a REAL ID driver's license or identification card. REAL ID progress over the past two years has been significantly hindered by state driver's licensing agencies having to work through the backlogs created by the pandemic," a statement from the DHS said. "Many of these agencies took various steps in response to the pandemic including automatically extending the expiration dates of driver's licenses and identification cards and shifting operations to appointment only."</p> <p>The Real ID law was passed by Congress in 2005 and is meant to establish minimum security standards for state-issued forms of identification like driver's licenses. Once the law takes effect, travelers will need to present a compliant ID in order to board an airplane.</p> <p>What is Real ID? Real ID is a set of federal standards for state-issued identification documents.</p> <p>"Security standards include incorporating anti-counterfeiting technology, preventing insider fraud, and using documentary evidence and record checks to ensure a person is who they claim to be," DHS said in a statement. "Under the new regulations, beginning May 7, 2025, every traveler 18 years of age or older will need a REAL ID-compliant driver's license or identification card, state-issued enhanced driver's license, or another TSA-acceptable form of identification at airport security checkpoints for domestic air travel."</p> <p>How do I know if I have a Real ID? Real ID-compliant documents are typically marked with a gold or black star, or gold or black circle with a star outline in the center of the upper portion of the card. California uses a gold bear with a star cutout. According to DHS, as of March 26, 2021, 55 states and territories were issuing Real ID-compliant documents for new and renewing applicants.</p> <p>Can I travel without a Real ID? For now, yes. Until the Real ID enforcement begins on May 7, 2025, older, noncompliant documents will still be accepted at Transportation Security Administration checkpoints. After the deadline, you'll need a Real ID document to travel, but that doesn't necessarily mean you'll need to get a new driver's license. Passports and other IDs issued by the federal government will be accepted.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/01 Experts worry of next pandemic
SOURCE	https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2023/01/01/covid-anniversary-next-pandemic-expert-concern/10847848002/
GIST	<p>For years, public health experts warned of the possibility of an illness spreading across the globe killing millions. After all, it had happened before.</p> <p>Measures were in place around the world to spot early signs of a never-before-seen bug with dangerous potential.</p> <p>That's why on Dec. 31, 2019, China notified the World Health Organization that a novel pathogen was circulating in Wuhan, the most populous city in central China. A day later, in that city of 12 million, a</p>

wet market selling live animals was shuttered because of fears it was the source of the virus that would later be named SARS-CoV-2.

Three years later, the risk of a deadly pathogen spreading around the world remains.

Now, in addition to worrying about a virus that might jump from animals to humans, experts are concerned about research accidents and – what should be unthinkable – the possibility of someone intentionally unleashing a highly contagious and lethal pathogen.

A pandemic has long been known to be far riskier for global security than conventional, nuclear or chemical warfare, said Lawrence Gostin, a professor of public health law at Georgetown University and a leading expert in global health.

"We've seen that play out with COVID and COVID is far from the worst pandemic threat that we face," he said.

Although it has so far killed more than [6.6 million people worldwide](#), other pandemics have been more lethal. The 1918 flu, for instance, is estimated to have [cost 50 million lives](#) across the globe, and in the 14th century, the [Black Death](#) killed between 30% and 60% of all Europeans in just four years.

Public health and national defense experts worry the next pandemic will come at an even higher price than this one. And the nation needs to be ready.

"It's incumbent on the United States and other countries to be prepared for whatever comes from biology, whether it's from nature or from engineering or a laboratory accident," said Dr. Tom Inglesby, director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security at the Bloomberg School of Public Health.

The next pandemic could be worse

Gostin sees nature as the most likely source of the next pandemic. A highly lethal strain of bird or swine flu could mutate naturally to become contagious to humans. That scenario kept health experts like Gostin awake at night long before COVID-19.

But other causes are possible.

"We have a whole host of threats from lab leaks to bioterror to bioweapons to naturally occurring zoonotic spillovers," said Gostin, author of the 2021 book "Global Health Security: A Blueprint for the Future."

"All of that leads to quite a high probability that we're going to have more frequent pandemic-like threats and we need to take them seriously as a national security threat."

The SARS-CoV-2 virus is the third coronavirus to pose a major health threat, following the first SARS and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome – both of which are far more lethal. Another coronavirus with the contagious potential of SARS-CoV-2 and the 30% death rate of MERS would threaten the economy, supply chains and the health care system, not to mention human life.

And those are just the direct impacts.

With COVID-19, we're likely to see indirect impacts for years, as people who skipped routine medical care are diagnosed with more advanced and deadlier cancers and children who missed routine vaccines fall ill with preventable diseases, among other consequences, Gostin said.

"If you think of a far worse pandemic, you can multiply that by 10- or even 50-fold in terms of the economic and social harms the United States would suffer," he said.

That means the world needs to have a better ongoing capacity to fight these threats, not spending money only after the crisis arrives, he and others said.

Right now, only about 5% of the country's health care dollars are spent on public health and preventing the next crisis. "That's a rounding error in the U.S. budget," Gostin said.

Manmade threats are real

The idea of engineering a deadly pathogen that sickens the world sounds like the stuff of science fiction or superhero movies. But it's no longer a fantasy.

Kevin Esvelt, an MIT biologist, said people in his own lab could theoretically assemble a dangerous virus from DNA ordered on the internet for under \$1,000.

Once pandemic-capable viruses are identified, thousands of people worldwide have the scientific training to make them from mail-ordered synthetic DNA.

"Imagine a world where you can order weapons-grade plutonium in the mail," he said, "and there are thousands of engineers who have the skills to put together something that might be a bomb."

In less than 100 days last fall and winter, the omicron variant spread from southern Africa to the rest of the world, infecting 26% of Americans, Esvelt said, illustrating how fast a pandemic response needs to be.

Esvelt warned Congress earlier this year that pandemic virus identification would make pandemics widely accessible and [recently released a 30-page plan](#) preparing for a world in which it's feasible to unleash one.

The risk is real and growing over time as engineering biology becomes easier, agreed Jaime Yassif, vice president of the Nuclear Threat Initiative's Global Biological Policy and Programs. Still, it's not "trivial to create a biological weapon that would cause significant harm," she said.

COVID-19 made the threat more real, she and others said, by showing how much chaos a global pandemic can sow.

"Some people may have taken note of the impact and paid more attention than before," Yassif said. "It's reasonable to assume that the intentions are already there and they may be growing and that capabilities are increasingly within reach. That's my rational calculus about why I take it seriously."

The potential for bioterrorism

The global [Biological Weapons Convention](#) was enacted in March 1975 to prevent countries from ever developing or producing biological weapons. It has largely held ever since, though a few countries that signed onto the treaty are believed to have or have had secret programs.

The Soviets once tried to engineer Ebola into a more contagious pathogen, for instance, but it didn't work well, said Christine Parthemore, CEO of the Council on Strategic Risks, a nonprofit, nonpartisan security policy institute.

China and Iran may have come right up to the line, if not crossed it, making offensive weapons, she said. Based on U.S. [government public assessments](#), for example, Iran may be using "botulinum toxin that we don't think is for Botox, at least not solely."

"The history is there," Parthemore said. "Countries have engineered pathogens."

The Defense Department initially became interested in mRNA vaccines, which were used to fight COVID-19, as a rapid way to counter state-based biological threats and engineered pathogens, she said.

And the vaccine that proved effective this summer against [mpox \(formerly known as monkeypox\)](#) was developed to counter the possibility that someone might try to unleash its deadlier cousin smallpox on the world.

But the vast majority of countries are unlikely to try to unleash a deadly pathogen, she said, because it would be hard to protect their own people during a massive outbreak.

Still Parthemore worries nations are losing faith in international institutions and treaties. [Russia's war against Ukraine](#) and the United Nations' inability to stop it have weakened international agreements in the eyes of many nations, including those focused on biosecurity.

"The loss of faith in cooperation and the U.N. and collective action and Russia and others acting as they have further degrading the norms we've held onto so dearly for decades – it's pretty scary," she said.

Should research be regulated?

One question is how much regulation should be imposed on scientific work and researchers involved in synthesizing potential pathogens.

Yassif supports "more rules of the road" to safeguard the scientific advances that might be misused by bad actors.

In 2012, the scientific community and others debated research in the U.S. and the Netherlands that explored five mutations making avian influenza more contagious to humans. Some in the virology community defended that research as essential for understanding naturally emerging risks. Yassif and others worry it made creating a global hazard one step easier.

"The systems we have in place are not as broad in scope or as robust as they need to be," Yassif said. The construction of new biosafety labs also has raised concerns among experts.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, more than a dozen countries have announced plans to build Level 4 labs, the highest level of security, designed to investigate the most dangerous pathogens.

These labs lack strong international oversight, Parthemore said. "Obviously, if you had an offensive program and you were trying to engineer pathogens in certain ways, a BSL-4 laboratory is where you would do the work," she said. "The lack of transparency in these labs and their proliferation is a huge problem."

It's also too easy to order the building blocks of a pathogen on the internet, Yassif said. Some companies screen orders to make sure they're not selling dangerous DNA sequences to bad actors, but they're not required to do so. "There's probably a sizeable market share that's not being screened and we're trying to close that gap," she said.

How to prepare for the next one

No single action can reduce the pandemic risk to zero, the experts said.

But there are plenty of options for actions and a "layered defense." Intervening at multiple points in the process a bad actor would use to create a biological weapon will make the world much safer.

Technology can solve the problem created by biology, Esvelt said. He envisions better protective gear, especially for health care and other essential workers, as well as germicidal lights that kill pathogens without harming the people who use the same indoor space. He wants wastewater and air surveillance at airports to detect new pathogens that might have a long incubation period before showing symptoms, as HIV does.

Preparedness isn't just about scientific breakthroughs. It also involves investing in people, said Dr. Raj Panjabi, senior director for global health security and biodefense on the United States National Security Council.

For decades, the U.S. has underinvested in those who deliver public and animal health, he said, including epidemiologists, veterinarians, public health nurses and community health workers.

In October, the Biden administration launched what it called a [National Biodefense Strategy and Implementation Plan](#) for Countering Biological Threats, Enhancing Pandemic Preparedness, and Achieving Global Health Security.

Panjabi described some of the strategy's goals and timelines in a [webinar](#) this fall:

- **Testing:** Enable testing for a new pathogen within 12 hours, surge testing within a week and pathogen-specific testing within 30 days
- **Vaccine:** A new vaccine should be developed within 100 days, enough manufactured for the entire U.S. population within 130 days, and for high-risk populations around the world within 200 days.
- **Treatments:** Drugs should be repurposed within 90 days and new therapeutics developed within 180 days.

"Time is lives in an emergency," he said. "How well we respond depends on how well we prepare.

The administration has asked for \$88 billion over the next five years to implement the plan. "Billions to be invested now to save trillions in the future and an incalculable amount of human lives both American and around the world," Panjabi said.

Congress has not yet followed up with adequate funding to pursue this agenda.

"It makes no sense that Congress has not taken up the administration's proposed pandemic preparedness agenda," said Inglesby, who recently co-wrote a [proposal for the development of diagnostics](#) in a health emergency. He hopes the money will be allocated soon.

Another disastrous pandemic is not inevitable, he and others said, but prevention requires preparation and forethought.

"Pathogens of various forms are very good at adapting and changing form. But modern science is very good at countering that," Gostin said. "If we're smart and well prepared and invest strongly and robustly in it, we can substantially lower the risk."

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HEADLINE	01/01 NKorea leader vows nuclear escalation
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2023/01/01/N-Koorean-leader-calls-exponential-increase-nuclear-arsenal/4171672578401/
GIST	<p>SEOUL, Jan. 1 (UPI) -- North Korean leader Kim Jong-un stressed the need to "exponentially" increase the number of the country's nuclear arsenal and develop a new intercontinental ballistic missile in the new year, Pyongyang's state media reported Sunday.</p> <p>He delivered the message during a plenary meeting of the ruling Workers' Party of Korea that ended the previous day. It was held to set Pyongyang's major policy directions for the new year.</p> <p>In a situation where South Korea has become "our undoubted enemy, it highlights the importance and necessity of a mass-producing of tactical nuclear weapons and calls for an exponential increase of the country's nuclear arsenal," Kim was quoted as saying by the Korean Central News Agenc in an English dispatch.</p>

He also called for efforts to develop new ICBMs and put a spy satellite into orbit as early as possible in a bid to "overwhelmingly" beef up its military capabilities.

"A task was raised to develop another ICBM system whose main mission is quick nuclear counterstrike," the KCNA said.

Kim has skipped his annual New Year's Day speech since 2020, instead choosing to use his key messages delivered at year-end party meetings to lay out the country's policy lines for the new year.

In an indication that the regime will continue its provocations in 2023, Kim laid out new goals for strengthening the country's military power for the new year early last week during the six-day WPK plenary meeting.

The North fired around 70 ballistic missiles last year, the most in a single year, including the Nov. 18 firing of a Hwasong-17 ICBM, amid speculation that it may conduct a nuclear test in the near future.

In December, North Korea tested a high-thrust solid-fuel rocket engine for a "new-type strategic weapon system," a move seen as developing a solid-propellant ICBM capable of reaching the U.S. mainland.

The North conducted a "final-stage" test for the development of a military spy satellite with a plan to complete preparations for the project by April 2023. It also flew five drones across the South last week in its first such intrusion in five years.

"There is a possibility that the North will develop a solid-fuel ICBM. The North may unveil [it] at a military parade, for which the country is known to be preparing," said Ryu Sung-yeop, an expert at the South's Korea Research Institute of Military Affairs.

At the party meeting, Kim vowed to strengthen nuclear force, stressing that the regime could use its nuclear arsenal if it comes under attack.

"Our nuclear force considers it as the first mission to deter war and safeguard peace and stability and, however, if it fails to deter, it will carry out the second mission, which will not be for defense," he said.

In September last year, Kim publicly announced the legalization of nuclear weapons, as the rubber-stamp parliament approved a new law that allows for a preemptive nuclear strike. He stated the new law makes his regime's nuclear power status "irreversible."

Seoul's unification ministry decried the North's "attitude threatening the same Koreans with nuclear arms," as well as its "obsession" with weapons of mass destruction (WMD) projects at the expense of people's livelihoods.

"As we greet the New Year, we urge North Korea to come out onto a path for peace on the Korean Peninsula and common prosperity for Koreans rather than sticking to a wrong path," the ministry said in a statement.

The ministry also accused the North of attempting to shift the blame for strained inter-Korean relations to the South, as Pyongyang castigated Seoul's cross-border approach as being "reckless and confrontational."

In a separate dispatch, the KCNA confirmed the firing of a "super-large" multiple rocket launcher on Saturday and Sunday.

The North test-fired three rounds of shells from the launcher in its performance test on the final day of 2022, and a long-range artillery military unit fired one shot toward the East Sea on the following day.

	<p>In a ceremony to "present" the 1,968,5-foot rocket launcher to the WPK's plenary meeting, Kim called it an "offensive weapon" capable of carrying tactical nuclear warheads that could put the entire South Korea within its range, the KCNA said.</p> <p>The North's leader called for all-out efforts to produce powerful weapons to "overwhelm" the United States and South Korea.</p> <p>He condemned the U.S. for frequently deploying nuclear strike means to the South in 2022 and strengthening its military cooperation with the South and Japan.</p> <p>South Korea is "hell-bent on imprudent and dangerous arms buildup while busying itself with hostile military moves to pose a confrontational challenge," he added.</p> <p>Kim has made clear that his regime has no intention of giving up nuclear weapons and it is not interested in returning to denuclearization talks that have stalled following the no-deal summit between the U.S. and the North in early 2019.</p> <p>Inter-Korean relations have been frosty especially since the launch of the conservative Yoon Suk Yeol administration in May on a pledge to get tough on Pyongyang's saber-rattling.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/01 Uganda New Year's crowd rush kills 9
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2023/01/01/Uganda-nine-dead-crowd-rush-New-Years-Eve/3041672585633/
GIST	<p>Jan. 1 (UPI) -- At least nine people died, including several juveniles, in Uganda's Kampala when a crowd rushing to see a New Year fireworks display got stuck in a shopping center corridor.</p> <p>Fatalities include a 10 year-old boy, officials said. The East African country was celebrating the New Year without restrictions for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.</p> <p>People were celebrating the New Year at the Freedom City Mall, which is on a highway linking Kampala to Entebbe airport.</p> <p>The stampede allegedly happened after a master of ceremonies at the event inside the shopping center told people to go outside to see the fires, Uganda's police force posted on Twitter.</p> <p>"The Katwe Territorial Police are investigating an incident of rash and neglect that occurred at a New Year's Eve event at the Freedom City Mall Namasuba and resulted in the deaths of nine people, including several juveniles.</p> <p>At Freedom City Mall, "there is something for everyone; it effortlessly blends business with leisure in a comfortable atmosphere with ample and safe car parking and good security. It is indeed a City of its own!," according to its website.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/01 Lula da Silva sworn in as Brazil president
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2023/01/01/Brazil-Lula-da-Silva-sworn-in-president/7191672600234/
GIST	<p>Jan. 1 (UPI) -- Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva on Sunday was sworn in as Brazil's president for the third time, replacing his political opponent, Jair Bolsonaro, who served four years.</p> <p>"I promise to maintain, defend and fulfill the constitution, observe the laws, promote the general good of the Brazilian people, support the unity, integrity and independence of Brazil," the left-wing politician said in a speech to Congress' Lower House.</p>

Lula da Silva, 76, served two terms as president from 2003-10. He was succeeded by [Dilma Rousseff](#) from 2011-16 and Michael Temer 2016-18.

Lula da Silva won by 2 percentage points in a runoff on Oct. 30 against the right-wing Bolsonaro.

Bolsonaro, who has refused to concede the election to his opponent, skipped the inauguration, boarded an air force plane [bound for the United States](#). The craft landed late Friday in Orlando, Fla., Brazilian media reported.

In July 2017, Lula was convicted on charges of money laundering and corruption in a controversial trial, and sentenced to 9 1/2 years in prison but spent only 580 years incarcerated because the Supreme Federal Court ruled in November 2018 that incarcerations with pending appeals were unlawful.

While in jail, Lula attempted to run in the 2018 election but was disqualified.

In 2021 the Federal [Supreme Court](#) ruled that the court that tried Lula did not have proper jurisdiction over the case and nullified the charges.

During the ceremony in Brazil's congress, parliamentarians applauded Lula before breaking into a chant of "ole, ole ola, Lula, Lula."

"Public banks, particularly the BNDES, as well as companies that lead growth and innovation such as Petrobras will have a key role in this new cycle," [Lula said](#). "The wheel of economy will spin again and popular consumption will have a central role in that process."

His day started in Brasilia with a parade. Then, there was the speech to parliament and then a trip to Planalto Palace, his official working address where he gave another speech.

[Up to 300,000 people](#) gathered along the esplanade to celebrate. Approximately 8,000 security agents from several police forces were mobilized this Sunday, according to the Federal District's security department.

On Wednesday, Brazilian Supreme Court judge ordered a four-day on carrying firearms in the capital. Thousands of Bolsonaro's supporters gathered at military barracks across the country in protest of the election result.

Police arrested a 54-year-old man on suspicion of planting and possessing explosive devices at Brasilia International Airport.

[George Washington](#) de Oliveira Sousa, a gas station manager, is a supporter of Bolsonaro. In a statement he said he intended to "create chaos" so as to prevent Lula da Silva from taking office again.

Bolsonaro condemned Sousa's actions, saying "there is no justification" for a "terrorist act."

"Brazil will not end on Jan. 1, you can be sure about that," Bolsonaro said. "Today we have a mass of people who know more about politics. They understand they are at risk. Good will win. We have leaders all over Brazil. New politicians or reelected politicians, they will make a difference."

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HEADLINE	01/01 China businesses' new Covid reality
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinese-factories-restaurants-adjust-to-life-without-zero-covid-11672577001?mod=world_lead_pos2
GIST	After three years of " zero-Covid " economic disruption , many Chinese businesses awoke to a happy new reality in December: No more restrictions.

But before they can take advantage, business owners in the world's second-largest economy say, they have to get their supply chains in order after a topsy-turvy time capped by [this abrupt reversal](#)—and withstand [a wave of Covid-19 cases](#) sweeping through employee ranks.

“Everyone fell ill almost at the same time,” said Hong Binbin, manager of toy maker Shenzhen Jiaoyang Industrial Co., describing an early December Covid surge that took out 90% of his staff in two weeks. The labor shortage forced him to delay a shipment of custom toys to a South Korean client to a January delivery date from the original Dec. 25.

Mr. Hong, who himself caught the virus at the end of December, said he felt helpless and frustrated at the lack of warning and follow-up guidance around the dismantling of the stringent Covid restrictions. Now, he is concerned that clients, fearing a wave of reinfections in the southern metropolis of Shenzhen, may withhold orders.

Since China's last major restrictions were scrapped [on Dec. 7](#), the pandemic has spread quickly across the country. Businesses describe being unprepared for the sudden end to widespread testing, mass quarantines and city lockdowns, and the labor shortages that followed as workers fell sick.

Manufacturing and service-sector activity fell in December to their lowest levels since February 2020, when the virus first spread across the country, the government reported Saturday. Economists say these struggles could ripple out across supply chains and affect the global economy.

“The world is connected through China-centric supply chains,” said Stephen Roach, a senior fellow at Yale University and former Asia chairman at [Morgan Stanley](#). “Any ‘kink’ in those chains spells trouble for global production and the world economy.”

But the prospect of a large number of cases in January—a time of year when business activity is disrupted anyway, by the Lunar New Year holiday—has many in the manufacturing and service sectors optimistic that normalcy could come as soon as the beginning of February.

“It sounds strange, I think it's rather helpful than harmful,” said Andreas Nagel, Shanghai-based chief commercial officer at Stulz, a maker of climate-control equipment that was hit in December by a wave of Covid absenteeism. “We have a real chance of getting back to normal after Chinese New Year.”

Restrictions are coming down as overseas demand for Chinese-made goods stagnates, with November exports down from a year earlier at the steepest pace in more than two years. Philip Richardson, owner of Trueanalog Strictly OEM, a manufacturer of audio equipment in Panyu, just outside the southern manufacturing hub of Guangzhou, said his company faces a double whammy: Covid-induced disruptions and a painful downturn in the business cycle, both radiating through the supply chain.

Overseas customers are generally overstocked after bottlenecks in China's supply chain finally opened up earlier in 2022, said Mr. Richardson, who has been in China for more than two decades.

In the absence of mass testing, it is hard to track the virus's advance. But conversations with business owners scattered across the country suggest it spread quickly across northern China early in December before moving to Shanghai and southern China. Hospitals filled up with mostly elderly patients, while working-age people were mostly able to bounce back after a week or so.

In the central city of Zhengzhou, employees at [Apple Inc.](#)'s largest iPhone contract manufacturer, [Foxconn Technology Group](#), have described a relatively rapid spread of the virus through the workforce, though analysts and people involved in the supply chain believe that [production is beginning to catch up to demand](#) for the costlier Pro models.

Many plants, hit by waves of infections, have simply brought forward planned Lunar New Year production halts.

Xie Haifeng, a 38-year-old forklift operator in Shanghai who reports that half of his team is sick with the virus, said he would return to his hometown in nearby Jiangsu province earlier than usual to celebrate the holiday. His employer, Yanfeng Global Automotive Interiors Co., which supplies parts for [Tesla](#) Inc. and other auto makers, plans to allow workers to leave five days before the weeklong holiday formally begins on Jan. 21.

The labor crunch is hitting the service sector as well. Shanghai Disneyland said its theme park, with its workforce reduced, has shut or scaled back some live shows, attractions and restaurants. The theme park didn't respond to a request for comment.

Covid is also keeping customers away from some businesses.

Xu Hengqiang, who sells rice noodle rolls in Shenzhen's populous Bao'an district, said orders in the last week of December were a fraction of the usual as cases in the city continued to rise. Delivery orders and walk-in customers totaled about 90 on Wednesday and again on Thursday, he said, compared with about 500 on a typical day.

Most of his dine-in patrons have already caught the virus, he said, while online orders have dried up as customers worry the virus will inadvertently be delivered to their door—a common concern in China, where authorities have urged disinfection of frozen foods and other goods.

China's usually efficient logistics networks also were temporarily paralyzed by the wave of Covid infections, prompting e-commerce giant [JD.com](#) Inc. to dispatch 1,000 workers to Beijing to clear a backlog of deliveries and Shanghai authorities to offer daily incentives of about \$8.60 to entice delivery drivers to turn up for work.

Mei Zhang, a 30-year-old cafe owner in Shenzhen, said delivering food and roasted coffee beans to her clients had become unusually challenging since restrictions were lifted. "Delivery men are mostly Covid-positive now," said Ms. Zhang, who has been working around the clock after her entire staff contracted Covid following the policy change.

In the final three months of 2022, Chinese businesses borrowed more from nonbank lenders than at any time since China Beige Book, a research firm, first began tracking the figures in 2012—a potential sign they are struggling.

"When companies tap credit there is always the question of whether it is being done out of optimism or distress," China Beige Book CEO Leland Miller said. "Here, the evidence for distress is overwhelming."

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HEADLINE	01/01 Covid astronomical surge in China
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2023/01/02/covid-19-china-third-year-anniversary-first-case-estimated-9000-deaths-daily/3841672589914/
GIST	<p>Jan. 1 (UPI) -- COVID-19 is surging to astronomical levels in Mainland China, an estimated 9,000 deaths a day and more than 250 million cases in a month, three years after the nation reported dozens of pneumonia cases of an unknown cause.</p> <p>On Dec. 31, 2019, the government in Wuhan reported the infections and days later it was identified as a new virus. Then, on Jan. 11, Chinese state media reported the first known death from the illness, a 61-year-old man who was a regular customer at the market in Wuhan.</p> <p>By Jan. 17, Wuhan was isolated from the rest of the world. It ultimately, led to a "zero tolerance" policy with quarantines, lockdowns, massive testing and other restrictions, including face coverings in the world's largest nation of more than 1.4 billion people.</p>

Fast forward three years, those restrictions have been dropped and huge crowds rung in the new year, including in Wuhan. The nation is bracing for the Lunar New Year holiday that runs from Jan. 21-27 though it lasts about 40 days as people take off before and after the official break.

Cities worldwide also celebrated without restrictions, including New York City. But unlike China, the virus has largely been controlled, including the use of life-saving vaccines.

Meanwhile, worldwide infections dropped 18% to 3,833,221 for a cumulative 6,697,867 Sunday. Fatalities were down 21% for 10,064 for a total 665,180,885, [according to Worldometers.info](#).

Those statistics don't include the true number for Mainland China.

China no longer is reporting asymptomatic cases and has closed a network of PCR testing sites. People who are using rapid antigen tests to detect infections are under no obligation to report positive results.

And only deaths caused by pneumonia and respiratory failure after contracting the virus are classified as COVID deaths.

According to government data, in one week deaths rose by eight to 5,249 in 89th place worldwide. No fatalities were reported Sunday. Before a spike in April, which necessitated a lockdown, it was 4,636, which stayed at that number since early February 2021.

And confirmed cases have hit 435,472 in 96th place. Sunday's infections were 2,983 with 33,139 in one week, a 59% gain.

China's record is 5,659 on April 29, not counting 14,108 on Feb. 8, 2020 early in record reporting. Before asymptomatic tests were dropped 18 days ago, the was 39,791 21 days ago when there were 3,709 confirmed ones.

In reality, around 63,000 people a week are dying, according to the British-based data firm Airfinity on Thursday, which is twice as the estimate from a week ago.

An American group, the [Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation](#), estimated up to half a million deaths by April and another million by the end of 2023 if China rejects social-distancing mandates.

The group also estimated daily infections were 743,000 per day on average compared to 960,000 the week before.

An estimated 11% of people in China have been infected at least once as of Dec. 12.

"By any account, the Chinese government faces extremely hard choices in the coming months balancing economic and schooling outcomes against the real prospect of substantial death, particularly in the over-80 population," the group wrote. "Using vaccines and drugs developed outside of China could save many lives. It is unclear if China will take this course of action at this point."

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HEADLINE	01/01 Second quake rattles northern Calif.
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2023/01/01/CA-54-magnitude-earthquake/7221672615941/
GIST	<p>Jan. 1 (UPI) -- A 5.4-magnitude earthquake struck Northern California Sunday morning in an area where one struck less than two weeks ago, according to the US Geological Survey.</p> <p>The quake hit at 11:35 a.m. PDT about 30 miles south of Eureka and about 9 miles southeast of Rio Dell, USGS said. The earthquake occurred at a depth of 17.3 miles, according to preliminary information from the agency.</p>

	<p>The office of California Gov. Gavin Newsom said they were monitoring the situation and were working with local officials on assessing the extent of the damage.</p> <p>"Stay safe -- check gas and water lines for damages or leaks, prepare for aftershocks and remember to drop, cover and hold on," his office tweeted.</p> <p>KGO-TV in San Francisco posted surveillance video from inside the police department when the earthquake hit.</p> <p>A 6.4 earthquake struck the region on Dec. 20, killing two people.</p> <p>Rio Dell, with a population of 3,367, is 267.5 miles north of Sacramento.</p> <p>"It was crazy. The earthquake felt more violent this time," Rio Dell Mayor Mayi Garnes told CNN. "It was shorter, but more violent. My refrigerator moved 2 feet. Things came out of the refrigerator. There's a crack in my wall from the violence of it."</p> <p>In the earlier quake, Garnes said 27 homes were red-tagged, meaning they were unsafe due to damage. Another 73 homes were yellow-tagged in Rio Dell.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/01 Church: more problems w/homeless camp
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/seattle-church-ramping-up-security-due-to-problems-with-growing-homeless-encampment-capitol-hill-washington-greek-orthodox-king-county-amazon
GIST	<p>SEATTLE, Wash. — Leaders at a church in Seattle's Capitol Hill neighborhood said members of their congregation are fearful of coming to services because of a growing homeless encampment that has set up around their building.</p> <p>Penny Peppes, the president of the Greek Orthodox Church of the Assumption, said the city has not responded to multiple complaints about the encampment.</p> <p>"We want them to get help, we want them to get off the streets. We don't have the infrastructure as a small church to do that ourselves. We need help," Peppes told KOMO News. "Our parishioners who come from all over are very worried about their safety. They are afraid to come. It's beyond frustrating because it's impacting our ability to come to church to worship."</p> <p>The church is located at the intersection of 13th Avenue and East Howell Street, just a block away from another growing encampment that KOMO News reported on last month.</p> <p>"The tents themselves started with one tent about three weeks ago and then quickly, quickly escalated," Peppes said.</p> <p>Peppes said people from the encampment have started sending Amazon packages to the church.</p> <p>"One of the homeless folks knocked on our door and asked, 'Did you get my package?'" Peppes said. "So, they are using our church as their mailing address."</p> <p>A person in the encampment who identified himself as Oberson said he is not causing problems at the church.</p> <p>"There's a lot of history of illegal activity happening with camps that, but that's not us," Oberson said. "I've done my part as a homeless person to exercise the resources available to get off the street and get housing. The ball is in their court."</p> <p>The encampment includes several tents and a mattress that has been propped up in front of the church.</p>

	<p>Peppes said her congregation has participated in homeless services for years, including providing food to two shelters twice a month.</p> <p>"We want them to get the help they need," she said.</p> <p>The King County Regional Homelessness Authority provided KOMO News the following statement in response to a story about the encampment near 12th Avenue and Howell Street last month.</p> <p>"The need for housing and outreach is greater than current capacity, meaning we need more affordable housing units for people to go to, and our outreach teams are quite busy working with people across the region. We confer weekly with outreach teams, and the City of Seattle tracks citizen reports," the statement said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/01 New WA state laws now in effect
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/washington-state-new-laws-2023-2022-year-effect-ghost-gun-minimum-wage-abortion-reproductive-rights-magazine-pay-transparency-pay-job-description-governor-inslee-seattle-king-county
GIST	<p>Numerous laws went into effect in Washington state as the clock struck midnight on January 1. KOMO News highlighted some of the key laws to know as 2023 begins:</p> <p>Minimum wage increase The minimum wage in Washington state will increase to \$15.74 an hour on Jan. 1. Workers who are ages 14 or 15 can be paid \$13.38 an hour (85% of the "adult minimum wage"). Washington state's minimum wage was \$13.69 on Jan. 1, 2021, and \$14.49 a year ago.</p> <p>The laws are different for Seattle, where employers with 500 or fewer employees will see a minimum wage of \$16.50. Employers with 501 or more employees must pay at least \$18.69 an hour.</p> <p>Of the states that increased their minimum wages in 2023, Montana is the state with the lowest rate at \$9.95 an hour, while Washington state is the highest, according to ABC News.</p> <p>Pay Transparency As part of Washington's Pay Transparency Law (SB 5761), employers with 15 or more employees are required in job posts to include the wage scale or a salary range, plus a general description of the benefits offered. Employers also must provide existing employees who are promoted or offered a new position with a wage scale or salary range of the new role, the law said.</p> <p>Washington State Gov. Jay Inslee signed the senate bill into law on March 30.</p> <p>Rideshare driver rights Beginning Jan. 1, rideshare drivers for companies like Uber and Lyft will have new rights and protections.</p> <p>Drivers will have the right to minimum trip pay, paid sick time, workers' compensation coverage and protection from retaliation for exercising these rights, according to the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries (L&I).</p> <p>"The legislation also created a Driver Resource Center, which will assist if drivers appeal being removed from a company's app," L&I said.</p> <p>Ghost guns A gun regulation will go into effect early in 2023 that prohibits selling or purchasing 'ghost guns.' Beginning March 10, 2023, Washingtonians cannot knowingly or recklessly possess, transport or receive an unfinished frame or receiver that has not been imprinted with a serial number issued by a federally</p>

	<p>licensed firearms importer, manufacturer, dealer or other federal licensee authorized to imprint serial numbers, according to giffords.org.</p> <p>Ghost guns — untraceable firearms that are without serial numbers — are often bought online in different parts and assembled at home by the buyer.</p> <p>Certain exceptions to the law include the transfer of unfinished and unserialized frames or receivers to law enforcement or to federally-licensed firearms importers, manufacturers or dealers.</p> <p>The law states that hobbyists can continue to make guns at home if they use parts with serial numbers. The crackdown on ghost guns comes after the state prohibited the distribution or sale of gun magazines with a capacity of more than 10 rounds of ammunition on July 1.</p> <p>“The new law effectively bans the manufacture, distribution and sale of magazines for rifles and a number of pistols that hold more than 10 bullets,” giffords.org said.</p> <p>Paid family and medical leave premiums increase</p> <p>The rate for paid family and medical leave premiums will increase to .8% on Jan. 1 as employers will pay 27.24% of the total premium and employees will pay 72.76%.</p> <p>Businesses classified by the Employment Security Department as having fewer than 50 employees are not required to pay the employer portion of the premium but must still collect the employee premium, according to the Washington Hospitality Association.</p>
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HEADLINE	12/31 What motivated substation attacks?
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/what-motivated-the-pacific-northwest-substation-attacks/
GIST	<p>SPANAWAY, Pierce County — Shortly after 5 a.m. on Christmas Day, Kathryn Henkel and her family were rousted by an unfamiliar quiet, a signal something was wrong.</p> <p>The big-screen television in their living room, normally on through the night, cut off. So did the refrigerator — and the oxygen concentrator that helps her mother-in-law breathe.</p> <p>The next lot over, a Puget Sound Energy electrical substation was dark. The constant hum of power had ceased.</p> <p>“There was nothing. No movement or people,” Henkel recalled.</p> <p>The substation near Spanaway was one of four tucked into forested neighborhoods in east Pierce County struck by sabotage on Sunday, which left more than 30,000 customers at least briefly without power, according to new information from Puget Sound Energy and Tacoma Power.</p> <p>These attacks followed six others in November — four in Washington and two in Oregon — that have once again stoked concerns about the security of the region’s grid as local law enforcement officials and the FBI try to determine who is responsible, and the motives behind the destruction.</p> <p>All of the Pierce County attacks came under the cover of darkness within an area stretching about 14 miles driving distance from north to south.</p> <p>The first was on a PSE substation about 2:40 a.m., and shut off power to 7,689 customers for two and half hours, according to a company statement.</p> <p>Neighbors and law enforcement have given different accounts of the timing of the next two attacks at Tacoma Power substations less than 3 miles apart. They may have unfolded in rapid succession beginning</p>

about 5 a.m. More than 7,000 customers lost power, with most regaining electricity by the next morning, according to Tacoma Power.

The last attack, which sparked a fire, targeted another PSE substation near Kapowsin about 7:20 p.m., as power company officials already had swarmed into east Pierce County. That knocked out power to 15,000 customers, with most restored in about an hour, but 500 had to wait for 16 hours, according to PSE.

Sgt. Darren Moss, a spokesperson for the Pierce County Sheriff's Department, says the Sunday incidents could be the work of one person or group.

"We can't confirm that. But obviously, we are going to look at it that way. Four of them in one day. On Christmas Day. That screams, 'I want to make a point.' What point do they want to make? I don't know," he said.

Attractive target

These are the latest in a string of attacks on the grid during the past decade that have highlighted the vulnerability of the U.S. power grid. One unresolved 2013 rifle attack on a substation in California, marked a "turning point for the U.S. electrical power sector," prompting utilities to reevaluate their security.

It also led to a new national standard that called for increased protections, according to a 2018 Congressional Research Service report. That report said security "remains a work in progress."

In recent years, several federal cases have highlighted the continued attraction of the grid to extremists.

In 2019, Stephen Plato McRae, in a federal plea agreement, was sentenced to 8 years in prison after admitting to shooting at a Utah substation in September 2016. He also admitted to earlier attacks in Utah and Nevada. McRae "engaged in this conduct in an effort to target producers of fossil fuel to bring attention to global climate change," according to a 2021 federal court decision denying a request for sentence reduction.

An August 2021 federal indictment alleged five men — who communicated via a message board used by neo-Nazis — planned to destroy substations in the Pacific Northwest as part of a plan to create "general chaos," and undertake assassinations in an effort to form a white ethno-state. Two of the men have entered guilty pleas, while three are still awaiting trial, according to federal court records.

In February, three men from Indiana, Texas and Wisconsin pleaded guilty to one count of conspiring to provide material support to terrorists, as part of a plot to further white supremacist ideology by attacking regional power substations.

Then, late in the year, came new high-profile attacks, with elusive motives.

On Dec. 3, two North Carolina substations were attacked by gunfire, cutting out power to about 45,000 people. Days later, North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper, alongside Duke Energy and Moore County officials, offered up to \$75,000 in rewards for people with information on the attacks.

In the Northwest, one of the November targets was an Oregon substation operated by the Bonneville Power Administration, a major marketer of hydroelectric and nuclear power to the Northwest and California. On Thanksgiving morning, two people cut through a fence, then "used firearms to shoot up and disable numerous pieces of equipment and cause significant damage," according to an internal agency email cited in [a Dec. 8 news report](#) by Oregon Public Broadcasting and Seattle's KUOW.

The memo obtained by the news stations also referred to "several attacks on various substations" in Western Washington, "including setting the control houses on fire, forced entry and sabotage of intricate electrical control systems, causing short circuits by tossing chains across the overhead busywork, and ballistic attack with small caliber firearms."

Witnesses recount Christmas Day

So far, law enforcement officials have not released details on how the Christmas Day attacks in Pierce County may have been carried out, descriptions of the damage, or their cost to repair.

Tacoma Power, in a written statement, said that as federal authorities have issued warnings and alerts, “we have evolved and increased our security measures ... and will continue to do so.”

PSE, in a written statement, said the 2013 California incident highlighted the importance of security, and that it continues to invest in extensive monitoring and protection measures.

Gary Moore, who lives across from the Puget Sound Energy substation near Kapowsin, said he did not hear any gunshots or noise that Sunday evening. He and his wife were having a Christmas visit with a friend when, through a front window, they noticed power company and first responder vehicles driving past and parking at the substation.

Across the road, he could see “blue arcing flames” shooting up from some of the equipment in the center of the substation. The fire lasted about a half-hour before being put out.

On Wednesday, the fence that surrounds the substation near some scruffy forest had a cut, since stitched back together, that may have offered a point of entry to the hazardous electrical equipment.

“I’m still amazed that they got out of there alive,” Moore said.

There are different accounts of what may have happened as the power went off at the station in Spanaway.

Henkel, along with her husband Tom, said they did not hear gunshots before the power going out about 5 a.m. And Moss, the Pierce County sheriff’s spokesperson, said gunfire had not been reported to the department during the attacks.

Yet three other Spanaway area residents, one of whom asked not to be identified, said they heard what sounded like someone shooting.

Eva Robinett, who lives less than a mile from the Spanaway substation, said she was lying in bed when the power went out. She heard her bedroom fan turn off, and then six pops ring out not long after. Her husband was getting up early to prepare a 14-pound Christmas prime rib.

“And then my husband goes, ‘Are those gunshots?’” she said.

Robinett posted about hearing what seemed to be gunshots on the Pierce County Sheriff’s Department Facebook page.

Christopher Langley and his family live less than a mile away from the substation. His children were up about 5 a.m. to look for presents under their Christmas tree when they lost power. “And then we heard a whole round of gunshots go off,” said Langley, who also posted his account to the Sheriff’s Department page. He estimated there were five to seven rounds.

For Kathryn Henkel, the substation outage was a nerve-racking blow. She had planned to cook a turkey dinner for her extended family of 12 who all live in the house.

Without power, those plans were shelved.

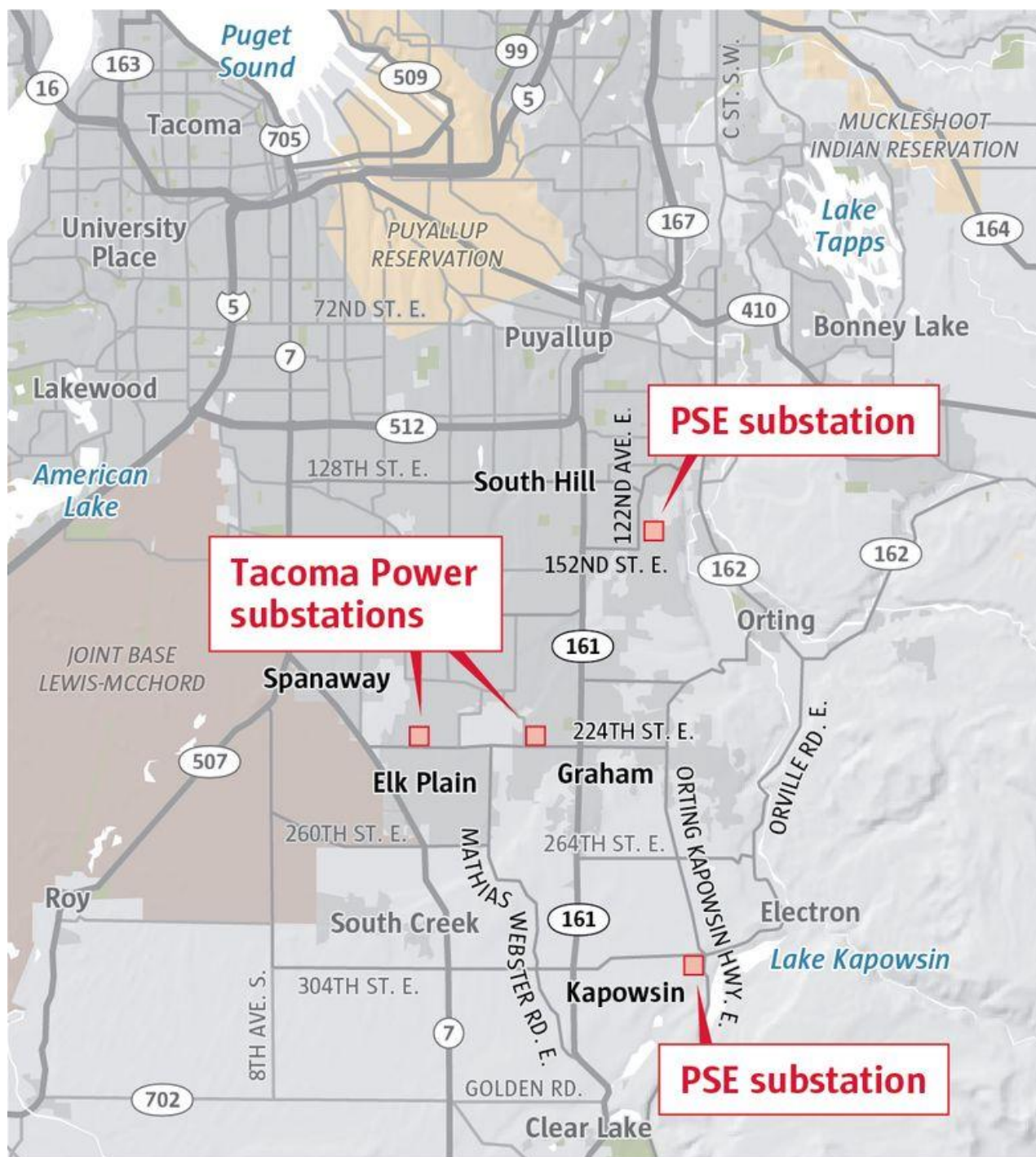
As the hours wore on, she worried about her mother-in-law, who, without electricity, was rapidly using up stockpiled bottles of oxygen. By late afternoon, she thought she would have to take her mother to a hospital emergency room to make sure she had a continued supply of oxygen.

She seethed as she pondered the actions of the unknown perpetrator of the attack.

“We made the best of it. We ate McDonald’s for dinner,” she said. “But I was beyond livid that I possibly was going to have to put my mother-in-law in the hospital when she wasn’t even sick on Christmas.”

Pierce County Christmas Day substation attacks

The first of four attacks was estimated to have happened in the early morning and the last in the evening on Christmas Day.



Source: Pierce County Sheriff's Department

FIONA MARTIN / THE SEATTLE TIMES

HEADLINE	01/03 Raspberry Robin worm evolves
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2023/01/raspberry-robin-worm-evolves-to-attack.html
GIST	<p>Financial and insurance sectors in Europe have been targeted by the Raspberry Robin worm, as the malware continues to evolve its post-exploitation capabilities while remaining under the radar.</p> <p>"What is unique about the malware is that it is heavily obfuscated and highly complex to statically disassemble," Security Joes said in a new report published Monday.</p> <p>The intrusions, observed against Spanish and Portuguese-speaking organizations, are notable for collecting more victim machine data than previously documented, with the malware now exhibiting sophisticated techniques to resist analysis.</p> <p>Raspberry Robin, also called QNAP worm, is being used by several threat actors as a means to gain a foothold into target networks. Spread via infected USB drives and other methods, the framework has been recently put to use in attacks aimed at telecom and government sectors.</p> <p>Microsoft is tracking the operators of Raspberry Robin under the moniker DEV-0856.</p> <p>Security Joes' forensic investigation into one such attack has revealed the use of a 7-Zip file, which is downloaded from the victim's browser via social engineering and contains an MSI installer file designed to drop multiple modules.</p> <p>In another instance, a ZIP file is said to have been downloaded by the victim through a fraudulent ad hosted on a domain that's known to distribute adware.</p> <p>The archive file, stored in a Discord server, contains encoded JavaScript code that, upon execution, drops a downloader that's protected with numerous layers of obfuscation and encryption to evade detection.</p> <p>The shellcode downloader is primarily engineered to fetch additional executables, but it has also seen significant upgrades that enables it to profile its victims to deliver appropriate payloads, in some cases even resorting to a form of trickery by serving fake malware.</p> <p>This involves collecting the host's Universally Unique Identifier (UUID), processor name, attached display devices, and the number of minutes that have elapsed since system startup, along with the hostname and username information that was gathered by older versions of the malware.</p> <p>The reconnaissance data is then encrypted using a hard-coded key and transmitted to a command-and-control (C2) server, which responds back with a Windows binary that's then executed on the machine.</p> <p>"Not only did we discover a version of the malware that is several times more complex, but we also found that the C2 beaconing, which used to have a URL with a plaintext username and hostname, now has a robust RC4 encrypted payload," threat researcher Felipe Duarte said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/03 Ransomware shuts Canada mining mill
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/ransomware-attack-forces-canadian-mining-company-shut-down-mill
GIST	<p>Canadian Copper Mountain Mining Corporation (CMMC) last week shut down its mill after falling victim to a ransomware attack.</p> <p>Listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange, the firm owns most of the Copper Mountain mine. Located in southern British Columbia, the mine produces an average of 100 million pounds of copper equivalent per year.</p>

In a [cyber incident notice](#) on its website, CMMC announced the shutdown of some of its systems, including the mill, after falling victim to a ransomware attack on December 27, 2022.

“The company has isolated operations, switched to manual processes, where possible, and the mill has been preventatively shutdown to determine the effect on its control system,” CMMC said.

The mining firm announced that it implemented risk management systems and protocols immediately after discovering the cyberattack and that the relevant authorities are assisting with the investigation.

“There have been no safety or environmental incidents as a result of the attack,” CMMC said.

The company has not shared information on the type of ransomware used in the attack, nor on how the attackers breached its systems.

According to a BleepingComputer report, however, [stolen credentials might have been used](#) for intrusion. Earlier in December, credentials belonging to a CMMC employee account were being offered for sale on a hacker portal.

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HEADLINE	01/03 Ukraine busts major vishing call center
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/ukrainian-cops-bust-major-vishing/
GIST	<p>Investigators in Ukraine have busted a call center operation blamed for defrauding an estimated 18,000 Kazakhstani victims.</p> <p>Officers from Ukraine’s Cyber Police Department and the Main Investigative Department of the National Police teamed up to arrest 40 individuals in connection with the scheme, including three Dnipro residents who were allegedly in charge.</p> <p>The call center staff rang up targets in Kazakhstan pretending to be IT security workers from their banks.</p> <p>After convincing the victims that their accounts had been accessed by outsiders, they apparently elicited sensitive account information under the guise of attempting to cancel the ‘fraudulent’ transactions.</p> <p>The scammers used this account info to access and transfer victim funds into accounts they controlled, as well as taking out loans in their names.</p> <p>The organizers of the plot are said to have paid the call center operators extra depending on how much they managed to obtain from their victims.</p> <p>It’s unclear how much was ultimately stolen from these victims, although they were targeted systematically from databases containing their personal information, the Cyber Police of Ukraine said.</p> <p>Searches of the call center and suspects’ homes revealed the existence of these lists, as well as 45 pieces of computer equipment, mobile phones and SIM cards which were subsequently seized.</p> <p>The investigation is ongoing, but those already arrested face up to eight years in jail for offenses under Part 3 of Article 190 (Fraud) of the Criminal Code of Ukraine.</p> <p>Police in the Eastern European country had several similar successes in 2022.</p> <p>In August, they claimed to have exposed a network of call centers involved in bank vishing schemes designed to trick victims into handing over their card details, as well as cryptocurrency investment fraud.</p>

	Then in November, Ukrainian police played a major role in an international policing operation that bust a \$200m investment fraud operation involving an estimated 2000 people.
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HEADLINE	01/02 Ransomware attacks, impacts 2022
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/ransomware-impacts-over-200-govt-edu-healthcare-orgs-in-2022/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>Ransomware attacks in 2022 impacted more than 200 hundred larger organizations in the U.S. public sector in the government, educational, and healthcare verticals.</p> <p>Data collected from publicly available reports, disclosure statements, leaks on the dark web, and third-party intelligence show that hackers stole data in about half of these ransomware attacks.</p> <p>No clear picture on ransomware attacks Based on available data, the ransomware threat in the U.S. struck 105 counties, 44 universities and colleges, 45 school districts, and 24 healthcare providers.</p> <p>Cybersecurity company Emsisoft compiled these statistics underlining that not all victims - less in the public and to a higher degree in the private sector - disclose such incidents and some of them may have missed the researchers.</p> <p>As such, the numbers in the end-of-the-year report on the state of ransomware in the U.S. should be considered conservative as they cannot be used to accurately form a trend.</p> <p>However, incidents affecting the public sector are more likely to be disclosed, allowing for more consistent data. Because of this, the researchers say that this information could serve as a hint to the ransomware activity in the private sector.</p> <p>“The reality is that nobody knows for sure whether the number of attacks are flat or trending up or down” - Emsisoft</p> <p>Ransomware affected 105 counties Compared to 2021, ransomware attacks on local governments grew from 77 to 105 but the number is not much different from the years before, which recorded 113 incidents.</p> <p>The researchers note that the figure for 2022 was “dramatically affected by a single incident in Miller County, AK” that spread to computers in 55 separate counties.</p> <p>Emsisoft highlights that in 2022, Quincy, MA, was the only known local government to pay the hackers’, losing \$500,000 to them.</p> <p>In at least 27 of these incidents, the hackers also stole data from the victims.</p> <p>Hackers stole data in 58 attacks on educational orgs Ransomware hit 89 organizations in the education sector in the U.S., 44 universities and colleges, and 45 school districts, and the hackers stole data in at least 58 attacks.</p> <p>Although the total number of ransomware attacks is less than 100 in this sector, the amount of potentially impacted organizations is more than 2,000 since the affected school districts are operating 1,981 schools. One of the most significant targets in 2022 was the Los Angeles Unified School District, claimed by the Vice Society ransomware gang.</p> <p>Emsisoft says that three educational organizations paid a ransom to the hackers. One of them was the Glenn County Office of Education, which paid \$400,000 to the Quantum threat actors to recover encrypted data.</p>

290 hospitals potentially affected by ransomware

Tracking ransomware incidents in the healthcare sector is more difficult, Emsisoft researchers say in the report, the main reason being unclear disclosures.

Because of this, they counted only attacks on hospitals and multi-hospital health systems, which added to 24 in 2022.

Despite the small number, the impact is much more significant, potentially affecting as many as 289 hospitals. The most notable healthcare entity attacked was [CommonSpirit Health](#), which runs more than 140 hospitals exposing data of 623,000 patients.

Emsisoft researchers say that hackers stole files in 17 incidents affecting the healthcare sector.

The company's report emphasizes that these statistics do not provide the full picture of ransomware attacks in the public sector as "there will be some incidents that did not come to our attention."

Furthermore, some attacks may have been still unfolding, unclassified, or unreported at the time of compiling the data. One example is the [CentraState Medical Center](#), which stopped admitting patients on Friday, December 30, 2022, "due to a cybersecurity issue."

Nevertheless, Emsisoft's report provides some insight about the ransomware activity in the public sector and how it compares to statistics from previous years.

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HEADLINE	01/02 WordPress alert: new Linux malware
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2023/01/wordpress-security-alert-new-linux.html
GIST	<p>WordPress sites are being targeted by a previously unknown strain of Linux malware that exploits flaws in over two dozen plugins and themes to compromise vulnerable systems.</p> <p>"If sites use outdated versions of such add-ons, lacking crucial fixes, the targeted web pages are injected with malicious JavaScripts," Russian security vendor Doctor Web said in a report published last week. "As a result, when users click on any area of an attacked page, they are redirected to other sites."</p> <p>The attacks involve weaponizing a list of known security vulnerabilities in 19 different plugins and themes that are likely installed on a WordPress site, using it to deploy an implant that can target a specific website to further expand the network.</p> <p>It's also capable of injecting JavaScript code retrieved from a remote server in order to redirect the site visitors to an arbitrary website of the attacker's choice.</p> <p>Doctor Web said it identified a second version of the backdoor, which uses a new command-and-control (C2) domain as well as an updated list of flaws spanning 11 additional plugins, taking the total to 30.</p> <p>The targeted plugins and themes are below -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• WP Live Chat Support• Yuzo Related Posts• Yellow Pencil Visual CSS Style Editor• Easy WP SMTP• WP GDPR Compliance• Newspaper (CVE-2016-10972)• Thim Core• Smart Google Code Inserter (discontinued as of January 28, 2022)• Total Donations• Post Custom Templates Lite• WP Quick Booking Manager• Live Chat with Messenger Customer Chat by Zotabox

- Blog Designer
- WordPress Ultimate FAQ ([CVE-2019-17232](#) and [CVE-2019-17233](#))
- WP-Matomo Integration (WP-Piwik)
- ND Shortcodes
- WP Live Chat
- Coming Soon Page and Maintenance Mode
- Hybrid
- Brizy
- FV Flowplayer Video Player
- WooCommerce
- Coming Soon Page & Maintenance Mode
- Onetone
- Simple Fields
- Delucks SEO
- Poll, Survey, Form & Quiz Maker by OpinionStage
- Social Metrics Tracker
- WPeMatico RSS Feed Fetcher, and
- Rich Reviews

Both variants are said to include an unimplemented method for brute-forcing WordPress administrator accounts, although it's not clear if it's a remnant from an earlier version or a functionality that's yet to see the light.

"If such an option is implemented in newer versions of the backdoor, cybercriminals will even be able to successfully attack some of those websites that use current plugin versions with patched vulnerabilities," the company said.

WordPress users are recommended to keep all the components of the platform up-to-date, including third-party add-ons and themes. It's also advised to use strong and unique logins and passwords to secure their accounts.

The disclosure comes weeks after Fortinet FortiGuard Labs detailed another botnet called [GoTrim](#) that's designed to brute-force self-hosted websites using the WordPress content management system (CMS) to seize control of targeted systems.

Two months ago, Sucuri noted that more than 15,000 WordPress sites had been breached as part of a [malicious campaign](#) to redirect visitors to bogus Q&A portals. The number of active infections [currently stands](#) at 9,314.

The GoDaddy-owned website security company, in June 2022, also shared information about a traffic direction system (TDS) known as [Parrot](#) that has been observed targeting WordPress sites with rogue JavaScript that drops additional malware onto hacked systems.

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HEADLINE	01/01 LockBit apologizes; releases decryptor
SOURCE	https://securityaffairs.com/140193/cyber-crime/lockbit-apologized-attack-sickkids.html?web_view=true
GIST	<p>The LockBit ransomware gang formally apologized for the attack on the Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids) and has released a free decryptor for the Hospital.</p> <p>The group is known to have a rule for its affiliates that prohibits attacking healthcare organizations. Its policy forbids to encrypt systems of organizations where damage could lead to the death of individuals.</p> <p>The gang explained that one of its partners has attacked SickKids violating its rules, for this reason it block the affiliate.</p>

"We formally apologize for the attack on sickkids.ca and give back the decryptor for free, the partner who attacked this hospital violated our rules, is blocked and is no longer in our affiliate program." reads the message published by Lockbit on its Tor leak site.

BleepingComputer [confirmed](#) that the decryptor released by the group claims to be a Linux/VMware ESXi decryptor.

The attack against the Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children took place on December 18, 2022. The hospital is the Canadian largest pediatric health center, it is located on University Avenue in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

The attack impacted multiple network systems at the hospital, but according to the healthcare organization, it did not impact the patient care.

"The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids) is currently responding to a cybersecurity incident affecting several network systems and has called a Code Grey – system failure. The code went into effect at 9:30 p.m. on Sunday, December 18, and is ongoing." reads the [incident notice](#) published by the Hospital.

"The safety and well-being of our patients and their families is our top priority. All patient care is continuing and there is currently no evidence that personal information or personal health information has been impacted."

The hospital took several days to contain the ransomware attack.

"The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids) has successfully restored many systems that were impacted by the cybersecurity incident on December 18." reads an [update](#) published by SickKids. "As of December 29, almost 50 per cent of priority systems are now restored and back online, including many of the systems that would have contributed to diagnostic and/or treatment delays. Patients and families should still be prepared for potential delays as work continues to bring all systems back online."

On December 23, the hospital [revealed](#) that it would take weeks to fully restore its IT infrastructure.

Affiliates of the Lockbit gang have already hit healthcare organizations in the past, in early December, the [Hospital Centre of Versailles](#) was hit by a cyber attack that was attributed to the group. Hospital Centre of Versailles, which includes Andre-Mignot Hospital, Richaud Hospital and the Despagne Retirement Home, canceled operations and transferred some patients due to the cyberattack.

In August, the gang [attacked](#) the Center Hospitalier Sud Francilien (CHSF), a hospital southeast of Paris.

The attack disrupted the emergency services and surgeries and forced the hospital to refer patients to other structures. According to local media, threat actors demand a \$10 million ransom to provide the decryption key to restore encrypted data.

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HEADLINE	01/02 Attackers never let critical flaw go to waste
SOURCE	https://www.helpnetsecurity.com/2023/01/02/threat-detection-events/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>GreyNoise Intelligence unveiled its research report that dives deep into the most significant threat detection events of the past 12 months.</p> <p>"When it comes to cybersecurity, not all vulnerabilities are created equal, and many of the ones that garner media attention actually turn out to be insignificant," said Bob Rudis, VP Research & Data Science, GreyNoise Intelligence.</p> <p>GreyNoise added over 230 new detection tags in 2022, representing an increase of approximately 38% from 2021. For its 2022 report, researchers provide insights into:</p>

- The celebrity vulnerability hype cycle, with a breakdown of the CVE-2022-1388, an F5 Big-IP iControl REST Authentication Bypass
- How hard attackers will work to never let a critical vulnerability go to waste by looking at the depth and breadth of CVE-2022-26134, a critical weakness in Atlassian Confluence
- The impact of the CISA Known Exploited Vulnerabilities catalog releases on defenders

In addition to insights about the most significant threat detection events of 2022, the report offers predictions for 2023 from GreyNoise VP Data Science Bob Rudis:

Expect daily, persistent internet-facing exploit attempts

“We see [Log4j](#) attack payloads every day. It’s part of the new ‘background noise’ of the internet, and the exploit code has been baked into numerous kits used by adversaries of every level. It’s very low risk for attackers to look for newly-exposed or re-exposed hosts, with the weakness unpatched or unmitigated. This means organizations must continue to be deliberate and diligent when placing services on the internet,” said Rudis.

Expect more post-initial access internal attacks

“CISA’s database of software affected by the Log4j weakness stopped receiving regular updates earlier this year. The last update showed either ‘Unknown’ or ‘Affected’ status for ~35% (~1,550) of products cataloged. Attackers know that existing products have embedded Log4j weaknesses, and have already used the exploit in ransomware campaigns. If you have not yet dealt with your internal Log4j patching, early 2023 would be a good time to do so,” added Rudis.

Expect headline-grabbing Log4j-centric attacks

“Organizations have to strive for perfection, while attackers need only persistence and luck to find that one device or service that is still exposing a weakness. We will see more organizations impacted by this, and it is vital you do what you can to ensure yours isn’t one of them,” concluded Rudis.

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HEADLINE	01/01 Website cloned to leak stolen data
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/ransomware-gang-cloned-victim-s-website-to-leak-stolen-data/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>The ALPHV ransomware operators have gotten creative with their extortion tactic and, in at least one case, created a replica of the victim's site to publish stolen data on it.</p> <p>It appears that ALPHV, also known as BlackCat ransomware, is known for testing new extortion tactics as a way to pressure and shame their victims into paying.</p> <p>While these tactics may not be successful, they introduce an ever-increasing threat landscape that victims need to navigate.</p> <p>Hackers make stolen data easier to get</p> <p>On December 26, the threat actor published on their data leak site hidden on the Tor network that they had compromised a company in financial services.</p> <p>As the victim did not meet the threat actor’s demands, BlackCat published all the stolen files as a penalty - a standard step for ransomware operators.</p> <p>As a deviation from the usual process, the hackers decided to also leak the data on a site that mimics the victim's as far as the appearance and the domain name go.</p> <p>The hackers did not keep the original headings of the site. They used their own headings to organize the leaked data.</p>

The cloned site is on the clear web to ensure the wide availability of the stolen files. It currently shows various documents, from memos to staff, payment forms, employee info, data on assets and expenses, financial data for partners, and passport scans.

In total, there are 3.5GB of documents. [ALPHV](#) also shared the stolen data on a file-sharing service that allows anonymous uploading and distributed the link on its leak site.

New trend forming

[Brett Callow](#), threat analyst at cybersecurity company Emsisoft, said that sharing the data on a typosquatted domain would be a bigger concern to the victim company than distributing the data through a website on the Tor network, which is known mainly by the infosec community.

“I wouldn't be at all surprised if Alphv had attempted to weaponize the firm's clients by pointing them to that website” [Brett Callow](#)

This tactic could represent the start of a new trend that may be adopted by other ransomware gangs, especially since the costs to do it are far from significant.

Ransomware operations have always looked for new options to extort their victims. Between publishing the name of the breached company, stealing data and threatening to publish it unless the ransom is paid, and the DDoS menace, this tactic could represent the start of a new trend that may be adopted by other ransomware gangs, especially since the costs to do it are far from significant.

It is unclear at this time how successful is this stratagem but it exposes the breach to a larger audience, putting the victim into a more delicate position as its data is readily available without any restriction.

ALPHV is the first ransomware gang to create a [search for specific data](#) stolen from their victims. The pages are for customers and employees of their victims to check if their data was stolen by the hackers.

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Terrorism, Extremism

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HEADLINE	01/03 Pakistan vows no nation to shelter militants
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/pakistan-countries-shelter-militants-96086254
GIST	<p>ISLAMABAD -- Pakistan's political and military leadership on Monday vowed that no nation will be allowed to shelter militants who stage attacks against the country — an apparent reference to neighboring Afghanistan.</p> <p>The statement came amid a spike in attacks by the militant Pakistani Taliban, many of whom are hiding in neighboring Afghanistan. The attacks are on the rise across Pakistan, especially in the northwest near the Afghan border.</p> <p>The announcement came at the end of a lengthy meeting of Pakistan's National Security Committee, which was attended by Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, the newly appointed army chief Gen. Asim Munir, and other officials.</p> <p>According to a government statement, the committee vowed that there will be “zero tolerance for terrorism in Pakistan” and that militants will be dealt with using the “full force of the state.”</p> <p>The announcement came two weeks after Pakistan’s special forces killed more than two dozen detainees linked to the Pakistani Taliban in a raid after they overpowered guards at a counter-terrorism center in the northwest and killed three hostages. Before launching the rescue operation, the detainees had demanded safe passage to Afghanistan, a demand the government rejected.</p>

	<p>The Pakistani Taliban, also known as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, or TTP, are separate from, but allied with, the Afghan Taliban. The Afghan Taliban seized power last year as U.S. and NATO troops were in the final weeks of their pullout from the country after 20 years of war.</p> <p>The takeover of Afghanistan emboldened TTP fighters who have stepped up attacks on Pakistani security forces since November when they unilaterally ended a monthslong cease-fire with Pakistan's government. The increasing militant violence has strained relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan's Taliban rulers, who had brokered the cease-fire in May.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/02 Military ops against IS in Iraq, Syria 2022
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/centcom-conducted-313-operations-against-isis-in-iraq-and-syria-in-2022/
GIST	<p>Throughout 2022, US Central Command and partner forces conducted hundreds of operations against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). These operations degraded ISIS and removed a cadre of senior leaders from the battlefield, to include the emir of ISIS and dozens of regional leaders as well as hundreds of fighters. All these operations were part of the mission to degrade the terror group's ability to direct and inspire destabilizing attacks in the region and globally, to include against the US homeland.</p> <p>During calendar year 2022, CENTCOM conducted 313 total operations against ISIS in Iraq and Syria as follows:</p> <p>In Syria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 108 partnered operations • 14 US unilateral operations • 215 ISIS operatives detained • 466 ISIS operatives killed <p>In Iraq:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 191 partnered operations • 159 ISIS operatives detained • At least 220 ISIS operatives killed <p>These operations were conducted under the authority of the CENTCOM commander, who retains authority for operations against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, and under the command of Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve. No US forces were injured or killed in these operations. Our local partners—the Syrian Democratic Forces and the Iraqi Security Forces—have and continue to play a critical role ensuring the enduring defeat of ISIS.</p> <p>One year ago this month, the US security relationship with Iraq fully transitioning to a role of advising, assisting, and enabling Iraqi Security Forces. Iraqi Security Forces are now leading successful unilateral offensive operations at the brigade level and making impressive strides in combined arms operations.</p> <p>“Over the past year, Iraqi Security Forces demonstrated an ability to continue operations to degrade ISIS, to aggressively pursue the terror group in Iraq, and to improve security and stability within Iraq,” said General Michael “Erik” Kurilla, CENTCOM commander. “Today, they display a high level of competence, professionalism, and progress in leading tactical operations, but there is still much work to be done.”</p> <p>“In Syria, the Syrian Democratic Forces continue to display the will, skill, and ability to aggressively root out ISIS leaders and fighters,” Kurilla continued.</p>

“The emerging, reliable and steady ability of our Iraqi and Syrian partner forces to conduct unilateral operations to capture and kill ISIS leaders allows us to maintain steady pressure on the ISIS network,” said Major General Matt McFarlane, commander of Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve.

ISIS maintains malign intentions regarding the al-Hol Displacement Camp and the more than two dozen detention centers in Syria secured by the Syrian Democratic Forces. ISIS also maintains the desire to strike outside of the region and continues to work with affiliates around the globe, most significantly in Afghanistan and Africa.

“CENTCOM sees ISIS in three categories,” said Kurilla. “First, ISIS at large. This is the current generation of ISIS leaders and operatives we are currently fighting in Iraq and Syria. While we have significantly degraded its capability, the vile ideology remains unconstrained. We must continue to pressure ISIS through our partnered operations.”

“The second category is ISIS in detention. There is a literal ‘ISIS army’ in detention in Iraq and Syria. There are, today, more than 10,000 ISIS leaders and fighters in detention facilities throughout Syria and more than 20,000 ISIS leaders and fighters in detention facilities in Iraq.” The January 2022 ISIS prison breakout in Al-Hasakah, Syria is a reminder of the risk imposed by these prisons. The ensuing fight to contain the breakout resulted in more than 420 ISIS killed and more than 120 partnered forced killed.

“Finally,” Kurilla continued, “we have the potential next generation of ISIS. These are the more than 25,000 children in the al-Hol camp who are in danger. These children in the camp are prime targets for ISIS radicalization. The international community must work together to remove these children from this environment by repatriating them to their countries or communities of origin while improving conditions in the camp.”

“CENTCOM remains focused on supporting these security forces as they diligently work to improve conditions at the camp. However, the only viable long-term solution remains the successful repatriation, rehabilitation, and reintegration of the camp residents back to their country of origin.”

The mission to defeat ISIS will continue in 2023 as CENTCOM and its Coalition partners remain committed to the enduring defeat of the terror group in order to maintain and enhance global security, stability, and human rights.

“We are committed and, more importantly, our partners in Iraq and Syria are committed to the enduring defeat of ISIS,” said McFarlane.

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HEADLINE	01/02 Concern: terrorism trends for 2023
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/featured/7-terrorism-trends-to-watch-in-2023/
GIST	<p>Just five years ago, a year-ahead terror outlook would have largely focused on the threat posed by lone actors operating out of allegiance to Islamist terror groups. After all, 2017 saw the retaking of Mosul and Raqqa as ISIS struggled to hold on to its physical caliphate, as well as the Westminster Bridge and London Bridge vehicular attacks, the Manchester Arena suicide bombing, the Barcelona attacks, the Hudson River Park bike path truck attack in Manhattan, the New York subway pipe bombing, and more. But that year also gave glimpses of the evolving terror landscape to come with the neo-Nazi vehicle attack on opponents in Charlottesville, the shooting of GOP lawmakers practicing for the annual Congressional Baseball Game, the sword murder in New York by a Maryland white supremacist who said he wanted “racial world war,” and the racially motivated shooting of Indian engineers in Olathe, Kansas.</p> <p>Fast-forward to 2022, and the attacks and perpetrators as well as the makeup of the extremists waiting in the wings reflects the growing complexity of the terror landscape, the ideological “hodgepodge” as termed by FBI Director Christopher Wray, and the threat diversity that complicates efforts to intercept plots in the planning stages. There was the grocery store mass shooting targeting a Black neighborhood in Buffalo, the mass shooting targeting an LGBTQ nightclub in Colorado Springs, the attacks on two power</p>

substations in North Carolina that plunged tens of thousands of residents into darkness, and the Colleyville synagogue attack by a hostage-taker who traveled from Britain — at the beginning of a year that saw an escalation in antisemitic incidents. And to close out the year, a 19-year-old from a small Maine town who [reportedly](#) dreamed of joining the Taliban is accused of attacking three NYPD officers with a machete outside a Times Square security checkpoint on New Year's Eve.

The hodgepodge of diverse and dynamic threats in the coming year requires unraveling some key areas of concern:

Copycats

Out of the attacks in 2022, two stood out as explicitly stating that inspiration for their attacks came from other killers before them: Payton Gendron, the Buffalo supermarket killer who [declared](#) in a manifesto that Christchurch mosque shooter Brenton Tarrant's livestream "started everything you see here," and Juraj Krajcik, who killed two people outside of a Bratislava LGBTQ bar in October and [stated](#) in his own manifesto that his "two inspirations to carry out an operation" were Tarrant and Poway synagogue shooter John Earnest — but the "final nail in the coffin" was Gendron, who "gave me the final nudge, allowing me to overcome my own indecision and begin seriously working towards carrying out an operation." Both Gendron and Krajcik were hailed by accelerationists as "disciples" of Tarrant and as "saints" — in which accelerationists "canonize" white killers who meet certain criteria including deliberate intent, motive, inflicting at least one death, and having a neo-Nazi, white nationalist, or far-right anti-system worldview.

The copycat threat is about emulation, recognition, and passing the baton to the next killer. It's not unique to domestic terrorists: After the 2016 Pulse nightclub shooting, ISIS adherents offered a CD-ROM package of all photos, memes, video, and ISIS articles related to killer Omar Mateen in a push for others to copy his heinous crime. The al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula *Inspire* "Praise & Guide" series has reviewed attacks such as the [2021 Boulder supermarket mass shooting](#) to assess what was done well by the attacker and what could have been done to inflict more harm.

Regardless of the ideological affiliation, the extremist encouragement for would-be terrorists to copy other killers is at its core a push for them to take the crimes one step further — whether with a higher death toll, greater damage to infrastructure, a longer livestream, new tactics or weapons, or an especially symbolic target. Recent accelerationist [encouragement to copy](#) the 2019 El Paso Walmart mass shooting, for example, suggested "a Crusius-style attack" on an establishment at which migrants are present "every week. A sniper shooting every day, slowly taking its toll."

Critical Infrastructure Systems

A banner draped from an overpass in Moore County, N.C., a couple weeks after an outage sparked by saboteurs declared "bring it all down" along with neo-Nazi imagery and a link to the neo-Nazi accelerationist National Socialist Resistance Front. After rounds fired at two substations in the county Dec. 3 knocked out power to 40,000 homes and businesses for days, accelerationists cheered the incident and encouraged more attacks on electricity infrastructure. But it was hardly a new call for action: One [accelerationist handbook](#) circulated last summer called for shooters to bypass softer targets in favor of causing chaotic blackouts by emulating on a broader scale an unsolved 2013 sniper attack on a California transmission substation. A larger subsequent handbook released by accelerationists contained attack threats, tips, or encouragement directed at critical infrastructure sectors, from short memes to detailed instruction. Their messaging is consistent: Infrastructure attacks from small acts of sabotage to larger and well-supplied team operations can be committed with a range of methods and skill levels, and can deliver blows — accelerationists hope — to stability and continuity while terrorizing the population.

But while focusing on the vulnerability of substations and the devastating impact that widespread or extended power outages can have on a community, it's also a time to think beyond electricity because adversaries definitely are exploring those options. The Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency classifies [16 critical infrastructure sectors](#) "considered so vital to the United States that their incapacitation or destruction would have a debilitating effect on security, national economic security, national public health or safety": the chemical sector, communications, dams, emergency services, financial services, government facilities, information technology, transportation

systems, commercial facilities, critical manufacturing, defense industrial base, energy, food and agriculture, healthcare, nuclear reactors/materials, and water and wastewater systems. That larger accelerationist guide, for example, discussed [ways to attack trains](#), cell towers, trucks and depots, water treatment and distribution, commercial business, communications, electrical systems, HVAC systems, and roads, bridges and highways. The guide stated that attackers are aiming for two types of impact: “the suffering your target will withstand, including the cost associated with restoring itself,” and “the heightened security on the local and national level in reaction to the demonstrable damage that can be done toward this target.”

Mainstreaming Extremism

In July 2019, HSToday [reported](#) on flyers signed by Loyal White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan and dropped in front of homes during overnight runs outside D.C. in Loudoun County, Va. The leaflets decried a grassroots push to rename Harry Flood Byrd Highway (Virginia State Route 7), named for the late segregationist governor and senator, declaring “leave our history and heroes alone” and “preserve our culture.” They added a plug to “kontakt the experts” — attempting to seize on highly charged debates about whether historical monuments should be removed or sites renamed. They saw an opportunity for a bridge issue: an issue that extremists exploit in order to bring others closer to their side by luring new recruits, to bring their side closer to others in an attempt to move their ideology or group into the mainstream, or to simply gain tacit sympathizers and people passionate about the issue who may be willing to look the other way at a new ally’s hateful core beliefs.

Recently, neo-Nazis and white supremacist groups have been trying to make drag-queen events including brunches, fundraisers, and story hours their own bridge issue, demonstrating outside of drag shows with banners and Nazi salutes, chanting at passersby and harassing attendees, and posting photos and videos of their actions online. First and foremost, these groups would like to woo recruits with these public-facing displays. But also important to them are those who, as seen on social media, will laud the groups for taking some sort of action even if they personally don’t ascribe to all of the group’s views or openly call themselves allies. Groups who have been protesting have also celebrated violent acts inflicted upon the LGBTQ community, so it can be a short bridge to cross from verbal harassment to either perpetrating or inspiring future acts of violence.

We also saw this past year with the mainstreaming of antisemitism how latent prejudices can build bridges between vocal extremists and those who have become willing to defend that bias. The year ended with scores of online memes lauding Ye’s antisemitic comments and Hitler praise as neo-Nazi creators even photoshopped the rapper into Third Reich regalia. Mainstreaming can make extremism worse both in terms of recruitment — if more people see ascribing to the ideology as now hip or acceptable — and when it comes to convincing more people to look the other way at the deeds of domestic extremist movements that declare they’re acting for the betterment of society in one breath and then call for the extermination of Blacks and Jews in the next.

“A full 63 percent of religious hate crimes are motivated by antisemitism — targeting a group that makes up just 2.4 percent of our population,” FBI Director Wray [said](#) in November. “Foreign terrorist organizations like ISIS have promoted antisemitic violent extremism for decades. They continue to target Jewish Americans in their attack plots. But we also confront the threat of people here, on our soil, whose hateful views — often paraded online — boil over into acts of violence.”

Islamist Extremist Evolution

ISIS and al-Qaeda both suffered the loss of their top leaders in 2022, with ISIS leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashemi al-Qurayshi killing himself during a U.S. raid in February and his successor Abu al-Hasan al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi killing himself during a Free Syrian Army operation in October, and al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri dying in a U.S. drone strike on his home in Afghanistan in July. As martyrdom aspirations are baked into their operating philosophies, Islamist terror groups are prepared to move to the next leader in line and, while losing a figurehead, could view the transitions as a chance to inject younger blood into the upper ranks.

As U.S. Central Command noted in its [year-end report](#) of operations against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, the fight against this group in its post-caliphate era is far from over. First, there are the provinces that have entrenched in regions around the globe, “most significantly” in Afghanistan and Africa. Then there are the ISIS operatives still being fought in Iraq and Syria — there was nearly an operation per day last year by CENTCOM against these forces. Then there is “a literal ‘ISIS army’ in detention” in Iraq and Syria consisting of more than 30,000 ISIS leaders and fighters. And there are the more than 25,000 children in Syria’s al-Hol camp who are in danger of being radicalized by ISIS and forming the next generation of fighters — or cubs, in ISIS lingo.

While this occurs in the military operations sphere, ISIS, al-Qaeda, and other Islamist extremist movements continue to utilize distance recruitment and training in order to inspire operatives in any corner of the world. Much of the ISIS propaganda that circulates nowadays is recycled “greatest hits” material, so to speak, with fresh content regularly produced in a weekly newsletter from the core of the group and magazines and videos largely produced by provinces. These publications have mostly concentrated on regional grievances, recruitment, and incitement, but have also added international elements whether in promotion of other claimed ISIS provinces or inciting attacks in the West. ISIS and al-Qaeda both expressed delight after the Jan. 6 Capitol riot and have sought to egg on extremism from the sidelines ever since. Over the past year, ISIS Khorasan in Afghanistan [declared](#) the United States a “banana republic” ripe for an “Islamic storm” after the execution of a search warrant at former President Trump’s Mar-a-Lago residence, [called](#) mass shootings and other gun violence in America an “‘unwanted’ population control program” and divine “tit for tat,” [echoed](#) the QAnon belief that a cabal of pedophiles is rooted in Hollywood and the government, [called](#) “social media warfare” critical to counter the pull of “enchanted” social media influencers, and [declared](#) that disseminating and weaponizing disinformation is a “duty” of jihadists.

Blurred Ideological Lines

See the hodgepodge above. Or, wade into online channels and chat forums where accelerationists are distributing ISIS videos because they admire the tactical advice and the jihadists’ passion and ruthlessness, or where posters who claim jihadist underpinnings are lauding the lone-wolf nature and execution of school shooters and replay surveillance videos capturing their brutal attacks ad nauseam. Throw in some ecofascism, incel culture, anti-government extremism, conspiracy theory extremism, antisemitism, anarchism, or neo-Nazism, add in extremists professing to be Christian or pagans or even occultists, and you have everything that is and isn’t a comprehensive threat profile. The Pulse nightclub attack may have been claimed by a killer saying that he was operating on behalf of ISIS, but it’s now hailed by domestic extremists as a model for striking at the LGBTQ community. ISIS admired the 2017 massacre at the Route 91 Harvest country music festival in Las Vegas so much that the group claimed for months that shooter Stephen Paddock was “a soldier of the Islamic State who carried out the attack in response to calls for targeting coalition countries,” even as it became readily apparent that Paddock had no apparent ideological motive. The Taliban victory in Afghanistan has been hailed over the past year by domestic extremists who want to bring down the government in the United States.

“The old-school world of kind of people with some purity of radical ideology then turning to violence is often giving way to people who have kind of a jumble of mixed-up ideas,” Wray [told](#) the Senate Appropriations on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies in May. “And, you know, we’ve seen cases where somebody one month is saying they’re an ISIS supporter, and then the next month they say they’re a white supremacist.”

And while extremists explore all the streams of extremism and cobble together their unique extremist profiles, tutorials including guides on how to construct weapons and explosives and inspirational materials from ideological movements that may not seem to align are shared online in furtherance of extremist beliefs turning to violent action.

Tactical Diversity

While extremists explore their ideological profiles, groups and movements are also trying to reach extremists where they’re at in terms of skills and ability to conduct attacks. ISIS propaganda, for example, encouraged traditional bomb-making and weapons training early on, but as the group and its focus on lone

actors who would never journey to the physical caliphate evolved ISIS was suggesting any novel attack method that might stick — from posing as a Craigslist landlord to lure victims to utilizing poisonous plants or venomous snakes to snap their foes. The crux of this see-what-sticks strategy was to encourage terrorists to get creative — not getting caught in the planning stages buying bomb ingredients or plowing through hundreds of rounds at the range — and also to meet potential attackers where they’re at if they have circumstances such as not being able to obtain a firearm or build an IED.

Domestic extremists also have been promoting the myriad ways in which adherents who have limited or exceptional skills can support their goals of infrastructure sabotage, striking high-value targets, or killing perceived racial, religious, or political foes. Neo-Nazi accelerationists lauded William Mallet, a 69-year-old retired train operator who killed three members of the Kurdish community and wounded three more in a Paris shooting Dec. 23, for finally acting on how he “always wanted to assassinate migrants and foreigners,” [according to](#) statements he gave to detectives after his arrest.

While trying to bring terror attacks down to the level of attainable goals, extremist groups are also reaching high with stated aspirations to utilize chemical, biological, or radiological agents to some degree. Dirty bombs were called holy grails in the aforementioned 261-page accelerationist guide because of the potential for higher casualty counts and larger-scale disruption or chaos intended to further their goals.

Political Violence

Midterm elections in late 2022 thankfully did not see the sort of violence that could reasonably have been expected with heated contests, hotter rhetoric, and close vote tallies. But anti-government extremism, violence or threats [centered around a specific political issue](#), violence or threats against politicians or election workers, and accelerationist ideology that believes in destruction of the current system are in motion whether or not there is an election just around the corner. And with the second anniversary of the attack on the U.S. Capitol days away, there are still 438 of 909 cases against Jan. 6 defendants still pending in the courts, according to the GWU Program on Extremism’s [Capitol siege tracker](#), amid claims by some defendants and their supporters that they are “political prisoners.”

The concern is at what point fury directed at the government itself or the players boils over into violence, and whether or not a specific catalyst — such as the certification of votes happening that Jan. 6 — is even needed to push a potential attacker to that breaking point. This could manifest in attacks on government facilities or think tanks, political offices such as the Capitol Hill [pipe bombs](#), facilities tied to specific hot-button issues, or people — as seen in the October break-in and hammer attack on Paul Pelosi. The man accused of assaulting the husband of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) at their San Francisco home allegedly [compared](#) himself to a Revolutionary War fighter battling “tyranny” and told law enforcement that he intended to interrogate and likely break the kneecaps of Speaker Pelosi to “show other members of Congress there were consequences to actions.”

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HEADLINE	01/01 Taliban: Kabul checkpoint bomb blast
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/islamic-state-group-kabul-afghanistan-government-taliban-cb03f7488c1320a305f0853fc21d43bd
GIST	<p>KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — A bomb exploded near a checkpoint at Kabul’s military airport Sunday morning killing and wounding “several” people, a Taliban official said, the first deadly blast of 2023 in Afghanistan.</p> <p>No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, but the regional affiliate of the Islamic State group — known as the Islamic State in Khorasan Province — has increased its attacks since the Taliban takeover in 2021. Targets have included Taliban patrols and members of Afghanistan’s Shiite minority.</p> <p>The military airport is around 200 meters (219 yards) from the civilian airport and close to the Interior Ministry, itself the site of a suicide bombing last October that killed at least four people.</p>

	<p>Interior Ministry spokesman Abdul Nafi Takor said the blast left several people dead and wounded. He gave no exact figures or further information about the bombing, saying details of an investigation will be shared later.</p> <p>Although Taliban security forces prevented photography and filming directly at the blast site, the checkpoint appeared damaged but intact. It is on Airport Road, which leads to high-security neighborhoods housing government ministries, foreign embassies and the presidential palace.</p> <p>A spokesman for the Kabul police chief, Khalid Zadran, was not immediately available for comment.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/01 IS claims attack on Egypt police
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/islamic-state-group-egypt-suez-canal-crime-0f0f83e440f8b6e43d901d168038c0ac
GIST	<p>CAIRO (AP) — The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for a militant attack on a police checkpoint in Egypt's Suez Canal city of Ismailia that killed at least four people, including three police.</p> <p>The extremist group claimed the attack in a statement late Saturday carried by its Amaq news agency.</p> <p>The attack took place Friday afternoon when armed militants opened fire on police in Ismailia. At least 12 people, mostly conscripts, were wounded in the attack.</p> <p>The dead included three police officers and a still unidentified person, according to a hospital tally document obtained by The Associated Press.</p> <p>The state-run al-Qahera News television station reported that security forces killed one of the attackers.</p> <p>Egypt has been battling IS in the northern part of the Sinai Peninsula for years. The militants have carried out numerous attacks in Sinai and elsewhere in the country mainly targeting security forces, minority Christians and those who they accuse of collaborating with the military and police.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/02 Taliban seeks foreign investment
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taliban-seeks-economic-self-sufficiency-foreign-investment-afghanistan-minister-2023-01-02/
GIST	<p>KABUL, Jan 2 (Reuters) - The Taliban administration will encourage self-sufficiency and wants international trade and investment, the acting commerce minister said, as Afghanistan faces isolation and suspension of some humanitarian operations over restrictions on women.</p> <p>"We will start a national self-sufficiency programme, we will encourage all government administrations to use domestic products, we will also try to encourage people through mosques to support our domestic products" Haji Nooruddin Azizi told Reuters. "We will support any item which can help us for self-sufficiency."</p> <p>Another part of their strategy was to boost trade and foreign investment, he said.</p> <p>"Those who were importing items to Afghanistan from abroad, they are asking us to provide opportunities for investing in Afghanistan and they want to invest here instead of importing from abroad," he said.</p> <p>He said that countries including Iran, Russia and China were interested in trade and investment. He said some of the projects under discussion were Chinese industrial parks and thermal power plants, with involvement from Russia and Iran.</p>

Already facing a lack of formal recognition and sanctions hampering the country's banking sector, investors are faced with growing security concerns after attacks on foreign targets in Kabul, claimed by the Islamic State.

An attack on a hotel catering to Chinese businessmen this month, which badly hurt several foreigners, could prompt some to re-think investing, a leading member of the Chinese business community has said.

Azizi said authorities were working to ensure security.

"We do our best for our businessmen to not come to harm. The attack hasn't had any bad impact, (but) if it happened constantly, yes it might have bad impact," he said, referring to the investment environment.

Azizi laid out a plan to develop industry by creating special economic zones on land previously used for U.S. military bases. He said his ministry was presenting the plan to the administration's cabinet and economic commission.

He added that foreign investors were showing interest in Afghanistan's mining sector, which has been valued at more than \$1 trillion. He said that an iron mine in western Herat and a lead mine in central Ghor province had seen 40 companies take part in an auction and that the results would be announced soon.

He said that a major contract signed with Russia in September for the supply of gas, oil and wheat would see the delivery of the items to Afghanistan in coming days.

The Taliban-led administration is facing increased isolation over policies in recent days restricting women from access to public life, including attending university.

An order barring female NGO workers has thrown the humanitarian sector, which is providing urgent aid to millions of people, into disarray, with some organisations suspending operations in the middle of the harsh winter.

Azizi did not comment on the new restrictions but said his ministry had allocated 5 acres of land for a permanent exhibition centre and hub for women-led businesses.

"We always support women investors," he said.

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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	01/02 Warm Jan weather breaks Europe records
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/02/extreme-event-warm-january-weather-breaks-records-europe
GIST	<p>Weather records have been falling across Europe at a disconcerting rate in the last few days, say meteorologists.</p> <p>The warmest January day ever was recorded in at least eight European countries including Poland, Denmark, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Belarus, Lithuania and Latvia, according to data collated by Maximiliano Herrera, a climatologist who tracks extreme temperatures.</p> <p>In Korbielów, Poland, the mercury hit 19C (66F) – a temperature the Silesian village is more used to in May, and 18C above the 1C annual average for January. In Javorník in the Czech Republic it was 19.6C, compared with an average of 3C for this time of year.</p>

Temperatures in Vysokaje, Belarus, would normally hover around zero at this time of year. On Sunday they reached 16.4C, beating the country's previous record January high by 4.5C.

Elsewhere on the continent, local records were broken at thousands of individual measuring stations, with nearly 950 toppled in Germany alone from 31 December to 2 January, Herrera said.

Northern Spain and the south of France basked in beach weather, with 24.9C in Bilbao, its hottest ever January day, and records broken at stations in Cantabria, Asturias and the Basque region. Only Norway, Britain, Ireland, Italy and the south-east Mediterranean posted no records.

"We can regard this as the most extreme event in European history," Herrera said. "Take the case of July 2022 UK extreme heatwave and spread this sigma (magnitude) in a much huger area, encompassing about 15 countries.

"We can arguably say this is the first time an extreme weather event in Europe (in terms of extreme heat) is comparable to the most extreme in North America."

Alex Burkill, a senior meteorologist at the Met Office, agreed it was an extreme weather event. "It's been extreme heat across a huge area, which is almost, to be honest, unheard of," he said.

Burkill said a warm air mass that developed off the west coast of Africa had travelled north-east across Europe from Portugal and Spain, pulled in by high pressure over the Mediterranean.

"It has been widespread, Denmark, Czech Republic, as well as pretty much the whole of Germany have seen temperatures for January exceeding records," Burkill said.

"It's also worth noting, we had some exceptionally warm weather in the south of England. New Year's Eve, I think about seven sites in southern England recorded their warmest ever New Year's Eve on record."

The meteorologist Scott Duncan said the temperatures across Europe were staggering. "We had a very warm new year last year but this blows that out of the water," he said. "We observed longstanding records broken by large margins across several countries."

Causes were difficult to ascertain, said Duncan, with La Niña and anomalous warmth in sea surfaces playing a role. "None of the above here is new though, so what took extreme to record-smashing status? Our warming atmosphere and oceans are ultimately making records easier to break."

Prof Bill McGuire, who has written about the consequences of climate breakdown, said the high temperatures were a portent of worse to come.

"The most worrying thing about this is that – such is the speed of global heating – it simply isn't a surprise any longer," he said. "It is a small glimpse of a future that will see winter reduced to a couple of months of dreary, damp, and mild weather, with little in the way of frost, ice or snow."

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HEADLINE	01/01 TSA: gun parts in peanut butter
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/travel/2023/01/01/peanut-butter-gun-tsa/
GIST	<p>Security officers at a New York airport found themselves facing a nutty situation this holiday season: gun parts buried in jars of sticky peanut butter.</p> <p>The discovery at John F. Kennedy International Airport came Dec. 22, when a checked bag triggered an alarm during the screening process. A Transportation Security Administration officer removed two jars of Jif peanut butter from the luggage and found parts of a disassembled .22 caliber handgun — including a loaded magazine — wrapped in plastic and hidden inside, the agency said.</p>

“The gun parts were artfully concealed in two smooth creamy jars of peanut butter, but there was certainly nothing smooth about the way the man went about trying to smuggle his gun,” John Essig, the TSA’s federal security director for JFK Airport, said in a statement.

The TSA said it flagged Port Authority Police, which confiscated the gun parts from the Terminal 8 baggage screening room. Officers found the bag’s owner, a Rhode Island man, in the terminal and arrested him. The man, whom the statement did not identify, faces a financial civil penalty of up to roughly \$15,000 for trying to bring an undeclared weapon onto a flight, the TSA said.

The peanut-butter gun made the [TSA’s list](#) of its top 10 unusual finds from 2022, an eclectic rundown that includes [a gun in a raw chicken](#).

The Rhode Island man’s arrest happened on one of most hectic travel days of the year, when [2.3 million people](#) passed through TSA checkpoints and security officers were unusually busy. Holiday air travel was up slightly from 2021 and dramatically higher than in 2020, when the [coronavirus](#) pandemic caused many people to pump the brakes on taking mass transit.

The peanut butter incident also reflects a rise in undeclared guns found at security checkpoints last year. The TSA said it [had intercepted 6,301 firearms](#) as of Dec. 16, surpassing the previous annual record of 5,972 guns found in all of 2021. Nearly 90 percent of the firearms discovered last year were loaded.

To try to stem the surge, the TSA recently increased its maximum penalty for gun violations by roughly \$1,000, to reach \$14,950. The agency says it determines the fine in each case based on specific circumstances. If the person has TSA PreCheck, which enables passengers to opt into a less onerous security process, the TSA also revokes that status for at least five years.

Travelers are allowed to bring guns in their checked luggage if the firearms are unloaded, packed in a locked, hard-sided case, and declared at the relevant airline’s check-in counter, according to the TSA. The same rules apply to replica guns. The TSA also advises travelers to check their airline’s specific firearm policies and the laws on each side of their trip.

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HEADLINE	01/01 Top-10 neediest cities in US
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/needy-charity-democrat/2023/01/01/id/1102623/
GIST	<p>Detroit has earned the dubious distinction of being the neediest city in America, according to WalletHub analysis.</p> <p>The study examined child poverty, hunger, and uninsured among 28 indicators in 182 U.S. cities.</p> <p>There were 11.6% of Americans living in poverty in the U.S. in 2021, and there were 580,000 homeless in the U.S. just before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in January 2020, which is the last time the data was collected, according to the report.</p> <p>Here were the top 10 neediest cities in America, according to WalletHub:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Detroit, Michigan.2. Brownsville, Texas.3. Cleveland, Ohio.4. Gulfport, Miss.5. Fresno, Calif.6. Laredo, Texas.7. Philadelphia, Pa.8. New Orleans, La.9. Los Angeles, Calif.10. Shreveport, La.

Source: [WalletHub](#)

Detroit has struggled coming out of the pandemic as 1 in 5 renters in the city face eviction in the past year, [The Detroit News report](#).

Brownsville has nearly 25% of its population living in poverty, more than twice the national average, [according to 24.7 Wall St](#).

Philadelphia was in the top 10 amid a crime wave that saw more than 500 homicides in 2022, [WTFX-TV reported](#).

New Orleans did not have as many murders, but it is hit with the highest rate in that category, [according to NOLA.com](#).

And the city that deals with Skid Row, Los Angeles, has more than 400,000 living in the streets, [The Nation reported](#).

Rochester, N.Y., had the highest rate of childhood poverty, followed by Detroit and Cleveland, while Huntington, West Virginia, had the highest rate of adult poverty, also followed by Detroit and Cleveland, according to WalletHub.

The top homeless cities are Democrat epicenters: Fresno and San Francisco in California; New York; Washington D.C.; and Honolulu, Hawaii.

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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	01/02 Germany vows crackdown NYE violence
SOURCE	https://www.leadertelegram.com/news/world/germany-vows-crackdown-after-brutal-weekend-violence/article_801efa1c-420b-51a6-a368-fd1c3d063ea8.html
GIST	<p>Germany vowed to crack down on people responsible for violence around the weekend's New Year celebrations, in which police, paramedics and firefighters were targeted with fireworks and dozens were injured.</p> <p>"The government, and of course the chancellor as well, condemns these at times massive attacks in the strongest possible terms," Christiane Hoffmann, a spokeswoman for Chancellor Olaf Scholz, said Monday at the regular government news conference in Berlin.</p> <p>"The state will not tolerate that people who are celebrating peacefully and personnel who are doing their duty are attacked in this way," she added.</p> <p>In Berlin alone, around 1,300 extra police were deployed and more than 100 people were detained for arson offenses, violations of explosives regulations, breach of the peace and assault of law-enforcement officers. Eighteen policemen were injured in the capital, one seriously, and 15 firefighters and paramedics required treatment.</p> <p>"Attacking police officers, paramedics and firefighters must be punished to the full extent of the law," Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said in a tweet. "The people who protect us all must be able to fully trust that the rule of law will also protect them," she said, adding that she was left "stunned and angry" by the attacks.</p>

While there was no evidence that the incidents on Saturday night were politically motivated, German authorities have repeatedly highlighted the growing menace of violent extremism at both ends of the political spectrum, warning of a threat to the nation's democratic order.

Last month, police carried out the biggest-ever raid targeting right-wing extremists, saying the nationwide operation thwarted a domestic terrorist group's plans to violently overthrow the government.

In one incident in Berlin in the early hours of Sunday morning, about 200 masked assailants attacked firefighters attempting to extinguish burning garbage cans blocking the road, according to a statement from the city fire brigade.

Laws to protect police and rescue services have been tightened in recent years and the New Year's incidents show "how necessary that was," Faeser said. "Now this legislation must be applied and enforced all thoroughly as possible against extremists and violent criminals."

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HEADLINE	01/02 US gun violence soars in 2022
SOURCE	https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20230102-u-s-gun-violence-soars-in-2022
GIST	<p>Across America, gun violence surged in many communities in 2022 as overall death rates from firearms rose to the highest level in nearly three decades. The year saw a near-record number of mass casualty shooting incidents, including several allegedly motivated by hate.</p> <p>"For God's sake, how much more carnage are we willing to accept? How many more innocent American lives must be taken before we say enough is enough?" asked U.S. President Joe Biden in a nationally televised address in May — days after the deadliest U.S. school shooting incident in nearly a decade.</p> <p>Biden joined the nation in mourning after an 18-year-old gunman wielding a semi-automatic rifle killed 19 children and two adults at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas.</p> <p>The attacker, a former student at the school, fired hundreds of rounds as he carried out the massacre. Heavily armed law enforcement officers delayed storming the building for approximately an hour, sparking outrage from the community and across the nation.</p> <p>The young lives taken illustrate a sobering statistic that guns are now the number one killer of children in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>The tragedy came less than a month after another a 19-year-old — also armed with a semi-automatic rifle — opened fire at a supermarket in Buffalo, New York, killing 10 people. The suspect said he was targeting Black people.</p> <p>In November, a mass shooting at a Colorado Springs gay nightclub claimed five lives and left 17 others wounded. The 22-year-old suspect was charged with murder and bias-motivated crimes.</p> <p>"We are seeing a return to much higher rates of gun violence than we have seen for a long time," said Jack McDevitt, a professor at Northeastern University School of Criminology and Criminal Justice in Boston, Massachusetts, speaking with VOA. "We are starting to see more people use firearms to go after victims who they perceive to be different."</p> <p>Analysts believe guns, especially semiautomatic handguns and rifles, are being used more often to settle disputes and in crimes motivated by hate.</p> <p>Investigators are looking into the possibility that antisemitism was the motivation for a gunman who killed seven people and wounded dozens of others gathered for a July 4 Independence Day parade in Highland Park, Illinois. From atop a building, the suspect fired 83 rounds in less than a minute.</p>

“Our sense of security is permanently ruptured,” said Dr. Emily Lieberman, a pediatrician who witnessed the shooting with her children. She and a group of fellow doctors traveled to Washington in December to urge lawmakers to pass a ban on assault weapons.

“As mass shootings continue to rise year after year, I realize that complacency is just as dangerous as these attacks themselves,” she said. “The time is now to save lives.”

Mass Shootings Rise

The U.S. experienced more than 600 mass shootings in 2022, nearly double the number recorded four years ago when there were 336, according to Washington-based Gun Violence Archive.

Mass shootings are broadly defined as an incident in which four or more people are shot or killed, not including the shooter.

Analysts see a link between bias-motivated gun violence and a rise in hate groups and toxic discourse in the United States targeting vulnerable, often marginalized populations.

“One of the problems with seeing gun violence in the context of hate crimes is that the trauma isn’t just to the individual; the trauma is to that community,” said Professor Carlos Cuevas, co-director of the Center on Crime, Race and Justice at Northeastern University. “It is a crime against a person but it is also a crime against a group.”

While mass shootings grab news headlines, they account for a small percentage of the more than 40,000 U.S. gun deaths recorded in 2022. Half were by suicide, according to Gun Violence Archive.

“One of the positive things in all of this is that mass shooting events are the most visible but the least frequently occurring ones,” Cuevas noted. “It’s important to provide continuing support to communities and help them recover a sense of safety that will help them heal from these events going forward.”

Debate Over Gun Laws

In June, Congress approved the first national gun legislation in decades. The law seeks to deny firearms to those deemed dangerous and a threat to public safety. It would also fund new mental health programs and require enhanced background checks on gun buyers aged 18 to 21.

Many Republican lawmakers opposed the legislation. “Democrats are coming after law-abiding American citizens’ Second Amendment liberties,” said Ohio Republican Congressman Jim Jordan, referring to the constitutional right to “keep and bear arms” that gun rights defenders believe should be broadly protected.

But many Democrats and gun control advocates want to go further and ban semi-automatic weapons, among other restrictions.

“Now the moral imperative is to act against ghost guns [untraceable firearms often bought online], against assault weapons, against high-capacity magazines, against a system that allows people to keep guns when they say they are going to kill themselves and others,” said Connecticut Democratic Senator Richard Blumenthal in December.

Georgia resident Henderson Masiyakurima said his perspective on gun legislation changed after his best friend was shot to death in 2017. “My thought on weapons and guns was like, ‘Oh, I’m defending myself,’” he said in an interview with the Reuters news agency. “Lately it just looks like, it’s just, been going crazy with a lot of this gun violence. It’s time for a change.”

While many gun rights advocates bemoaned the law passed by Congress, they cheered a U.S. Supreme Court decision striking down a New York state law that restricted the carrying of concealed handguns in public.

“They are lawful citizens that have the right to bear arms. And they also have the right, now the Supreme Court has said it, to bear arms outside the home and protect themselves,” said Tiffany Cheuvront, an attorney for the California Rifle and Pistol Association.

Following the ruling, some Democrat-led states moved to enhance gun laws while Republican-led states sought to challenge or eliminate existing gun restrictions.

Gun Availability

The changing legal landscape for firearms comes as gun ownership continues to grow in the United States.

American gunmakers churned out more than 11 million firearms in 2020, nearly three times the number manufactured in 2000, according to a report by the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. A survey by the nonpartisan Small Arms Survey estimated the U.S. had about 400 million firearms in 2018, more guns than the country’s population.

As the number of firearms grows, the United States remains plagued by the highest rate of gun deaths among advanced industrialized nations.

“It looked like we were moving the needle pretty well in terms of reducing gun violence, but we have seen it come back with a vengeance over the past three or four years,” said criminologist McDevitt. “The reality is we should be comparing ourselves to other countries where it’s hard to get guns, like Britain and Japan, where gun violence rates are 10 times less than in some of the safest U.S. states.”

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HEADLINE	01/02 Credit union closes 2 Seattle sites: crime
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3766499/rantz-major-credit-union-to-close-seattle-branches-over-crime/
GIST	<p>Seattle Credit Union customers learned just before the New Year that two branches will be closing due to the city’s rampant crime. The news comes as multiple Starbucks locations have closed over the same concern.</p> <p>“Ensuring the physical safety of our members and staff both in and around our branch offices has become increasingly difficult at these locations. Your personal safety, as well as your financial well-being and banking preferences, are important to us, representing the key variables in our decision,” a Dec. 30 email explained to customers.</p> <p>The members-owned credit union is closing its Georgetown and Rainier Valley branches effective Feb. 3. Company leadership fielded concerns from customers and staff that the areas were not safe enough.</p> <p>Threats, vandalism, and break-ins</p> <p>A spokesperson for Seattle Credit Union cited verbal threats and frequent vandalism and break-ins for the closures.</p> <p>“Our mission to guide households, individuals, and businesses to a position of financial prosperity require environments free of verbal threats of harm, damaged property, excessive onsite security, and frequent closures resulting from vandalism and/or break-ins,” a spokesperson told the Jason Rantz Show on KTTH.</p> <p>They were working with Seattle Police to address the concerns, but it has become too dangerous and costly to keep the locations open.</p> <p>The trend continues</p> <p>In September, Bartell Drugs announced it was closing its Chinatown-International District location after relentless theft and vandalism.</p> <p>“I knew it was coming, given the number of robberies we had in the store,” said a Bartell’s employee to Northwest Asian Weekly. “But I am still sad and shocked. We have already built our relationship with customers.”</p>

In downtown Seattle, scores of businesses, including Amazon, stayed remote or made alternative accommodations through much of 2022, also citing public safety concerns.

Yellow Butterfly Coffee in Seattle's Pioneer Square has dealt with ongoing issues. Its owner, Robert, recently dealt with a drug dealer who refused to leave and camped out in front of his storefront.

"He says, 'I'm not moving, and I got guns.' Today, the same guy, he threatens me with a gun," Robert told the Jason Rantz Show on KTTH.

The Seattle Credit Union closures were announced after weeks of contentious pushback from Starbucks union workers. Some claimed the coffee giant was feigning concern over public safety in order to punish organizers asking for higher pay and better benefits. They argued that crime wasn't really an issue, with the union-friendly Seattle Times amplifying the false claims. This news should put that silly, politically motivated talking point to bed.

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HEADLINE	01/02 Suspect pulled over twice in race to home?
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/idaho-murders-suspect-pulled-over-twice-on-cross-country-race-home-with-dad-lawyer-claims
GIST	<p>MOSCOW, Idaho - Bryan Kohberger, the suspected killer of four University of Idaho students who police arrested in Pennsylvania Friday, made the 2,500-mile road trip home with his dad and was pulled over twice along the way, according to his public defender.</p> <p>Jason LaBar, Kohberger's Pennsylvania defense attorney in the extradition case, did not immediately respond to Fox News Digital's request for comment Monday.</p> <p>However, he illustrated parts of the suspect's cross-country race home in a televised interview, stating that Kohberger's dad flew into Spokane, Washington, and then drove down to Pullman in a pre-planned trip ahead of the drive home ahead of the holiday break.</p> <p>"I don't know whether they were speeding or not or if they were even issued a ticket," LaBar reportedly told NBC. "I just know that they were pulled over in Indiana almost back-to-back. I believe once for speeding and once for falling too closely to a car in front of them."</p> <p>An Indiana State Police spokesman told Fox News Digital he could not find evidence of any such encounters.</p> <p>"We have examined records and do not find any record of any traffic stops or any interactions involving Bryan Kohberger, his father, or any Kohberger," Sgt. Glen Fifield said Monday.</p> <p>LaBar did not immediately clarify which jurisdictions the stops happened in.</p> <p>Kohberger, 28, was a PhD candidate at Washington State University in Pullman, roughly 10 miles from the University of Idaho in Moscow. The two communities lie just across state lines from one another.</p> <p>Classes ended at WSU on Dec. 15 and the following day at UI. It was not immediately clear when Kohberger left Pullman, but he returned to Albrightsville, Pennsylvania by Dec. 17, according to LaBar.</p> <p>Police allege that sometime between 3 and 4 a.m. on Saturday, Nov. 13, 2022, Kohberger entered a six-bedroom house and attacked four students in their sleep with a knife.</p> <p>The ambush killed Maddie Mogen and Kaylee Goncalves, 21-year-old best friends, as well as their housemate Xana Kernodle and her boyfriend Ethan Chapin, both 20.</p>

	<p>Two other young women on the home's bottom level were left alone, according to police.</p> <p>Kohberger has a master's degree from DeSales in criminal justice and was studying at WSU's department of criminal justice and criminology.</p> <p>Pennsylvania police arrested him on Friday after Idaho authorities charged him with four counts of first-degree murder and another charge of felony burglary for allegedly entering a residence with intent to commit murder.</p> <p>Idaho murders latest: Suspect arrested in Pennsylvania in connection to the murder of 4 U Idaho students In Washington, investigators searched his apartment for hours on the same day, removing boxes and bags of evidence as well as a desktop computer.</p> <p>Kohberger is expected to waive extradition Tuesday and return to Idaho to face the charges.</p> <p>Through his attorney, he said he expects to be exonerated.</p> <p>However John Kelly, a criminal profiler and psychotherapist who has interviewed multiple serial killers, told Fox News Digital Monday that if Kohberger did commit the crimes, he made a series of key errors, especially for someone with an education focused on criminology.</p> <p>"Flight can be a sign of guilt," Kelly said.</p> <p>But other mistakes include the indoor crime scene – virtually impossible to clean up, attacking so many people at once with a knife and allegedly believing he could avoid leaving behind evidence.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/02 Machete suspect on federal watchlist?
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/suspect-charged-attacking-police-officers-machete-times-square/story?id=96084728
GIST	<p>The 19-year-old accused of attacking three police officers with a machete on New Year's Eve near Times Square has been charged with two counts of attempted murder of a police officer and two counts of attempted assault.</p> <p>Trevor Bickford, from Wells, Maine, allegedly attacked the officers unprovoked after taking a train to the city on Dec. 29, 2022. His alleged assault came weeks after the suspect was placed on a federal watchlist that would have prevented him from traveling overseas after his mother informed the FBI about her son's gravitation toward Islamic extremism, law enforcement sources told ABC News.</p> <p>Police found the suspect's backpack at the scene, which contained a diary, sources said.</p> <p>The final diary entry indicated the suspect thought he would die in the attack and asked for burial according to Islamic tradition, the sources said.</p> <p>Bickford has made statements to investigators that strengthen the belief the attack was motivated by Islamic extremism, law enforcement sources told ABC News.</p> <p>Bickford told police he took a sip of water and shouted "Allahu Akhbar" before attacking the officers with a knife, sources said.</p> <p>The knife was purchased in Maine, where Bickford also withdrew thousands of dollars in cash at some point before taking Amtrak to New York. The withdrawal and the purchase suggest premeditation, sources said.</p>

The knife was described as rusted and blunt, according to sources. Had it been sharper, the injuries to the officers would likely have been more severe, the sources said.

Last month, Bickford's mother allegedly called the FBI and warned them about his gravitation toward Islamic extremism, according to law enforcement sources. The FBI interviewed Bickford and determined he sought to travel to Afghanistan to fight for the cause, the sources told ABC News on Monday.

Bickford was allegedly placed on a federal watchlist that would have prevented him from traveling overseas, but there was nothing to prevent him from boarding an Amtrak train to New York on Dec. 29, the sources told ABC News.

Upon arrival in New York, the suspect made a large cash donation to the Bowery Mission, which investigators believe was meant to satisfy a Muslim tenet of charity.

From there, it's believed Bickford slept in a park in Forest Park, Queens. Police recovered a sleeping bag linked to the suspect, sources said. Investigators are interested in what brought him to the park in a remote part of the city and whether he intended to meet anyone.

The three officers were released from the hospital on Sunday.

New York Police Commissioner Keechant Sewell reporters during a press conference Sunday that the incident occurred just after 10 p.m. on Saturday near West 52nd Street and Eighth Avenue, outside the secure area that had been set up for New Year's Eve celebrations.

Sewell said the attack was "unprovoked" and that Bickford attempted to strike one officer over the head with the machete.

"The male then struck two additional officers in the head with the machete," she said.

One of the officers fired their weapon, striking the suspect in the shoulder, according to Sewell. The suspect was then taken into custody.

Bickford remains hospitalized in custody at Bellevue Hospital because of the injuries he sustained when police shot him.

One of the injured officers, an eight-year veteran of the NYPD, suffered a laceration to the head, officials said. Another hurt officer had just graduated from the police academy on Friday, and as is traditionally the case, his first assignment was the New Year's Eve detail in Times Square.

The rookie was also struck in the head, resulting in a skull fracture and large laceration, officials said.

Prior to New Year's Eve, the NYPD had noted that terrorist groups had been mobilizing for a potential New Year's Day attack.

"Throughout December, multiple pro-ISIS users disseminated extremist propaganda graphics broadly calling for attacks in advance of the New Year, advocating a wide range of low-tech tactics," the NYPD's pre-event assessment report said.

The FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force had previously looked into the suspect, law enforcement sources told ABC News, after the reports from his mother and aunt. Federal terrorism charges are still possible in the attack.

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HEADLINE	01/01 Florida shooting: 2 dead, 4 injured
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/01/us/ocala-florida-new-years-day-shooting

GIST	<p>Two people died and four others were injured in a shooting in Ocala, Florida, early Sunday, authorities said.</p> <p>Gunfire broke out around 4:30 a.m. near the 1600 block of Southwest 5th Street, in an area where a crowd of about 100 people were gathered, police said in a news release.</p> <p>Davonta Harris, 30, and Abdul Hakeem Van Croskey, 24, were identified by the police as the two people killed. Four other victims, whose names were not released, were in stable condition.</p> <p>“Detectives are investigating the crime and are working diligently to determine the facts behind the fatal shooting and are actively working on leads,” Ocala police said.</p> <p>“The tragic event has left many devastated and mourning. Our thoughts and prayers go out to all those affected by this terrible act,” police said.</p> <p>Ocala is about 75 miles northwest of Orlando.</p> <p>A few hours earlier, a New Year’s Eve shooting left a 24-year-old dead and nine others injured in Mobile, Alabama, police said. The shooting happened just blocks from where people had gathered for the city’s New Year’s Eve celebration.</p> <p>Return to Top</p>
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HEADLINE	01/02 Ample evidence secures Jan 6 convictions
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/ample-jan-6-evidence-helps-secure-high-conviction-rate-in-capitol-riot-11672627806?mod=us_more_pos1
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON—In the two years since a pro-Trump mob stormed the U.S. Capitol, prosecutors have secured guilty pleas from more than half the rioters they have charged, helping lead to a 99.8% conviction rate.</p> <p>Dustin Thompson tried to beat those odds. The 38-year-old Ohioan pleaded not guilty and took the stand to say he was only answering President Trump’s call that day to supporters to “fight like hell.” Now he is serving a three-year sentence after jurors convicted him on a number of charges, talking to his wife twice a day from a jailhouse iPad.</p> <p>The Justice Department has charged more than 900 people, extracting guilty pleas from at least 450 of them on crimes ranging from unlawfully parading in a Capitol building to assault, obstruction and sedition. More than 180 rioters have been sentenced to jail time.</p> <p>In the days after the riot, federal investigators appeared to face a massive task tracking down the crowd of participants after law-enforcement authorities that day let most of them leave without arrests. Many there posted their own actions on social media, and that, combined with footage from police officers’ body cameras and Capitol surveillance, gave investigators a deep trove of evidence that allowed the Justice Department to mobilize one of the largest investigations in its history.</p> <p>About three dozen cases have gone to trial, and all but one of them have resulted in convictions on at least one count, though prosecutors have lost on other charges.</p> <p>The conviction rate, which includes pleas, is higher than the Justice Department attains across all of its cases. In the year that ended in September 2019, before the coronavirus pandemic halted most trials for more than a year, around 92% of the nearly 85,000 defendants adjudicated were convicted, according to Justice Department statistics.</p> <p>That record could be tested when prosecutors are scheduled to open their case this week against several members of the right-wing Proud Boys, including the group’s former leader, Enrique Tarrio, on charges including seditious conspiracy. The defendants have said their participation in the riot wasn’t part of a</p>

premeditated plan that hinged on violence. Prosecutors face a high bar in securing a conviction on sedition because it requires them to prove there was a conspiracy to attack government agents or officials that posed an imminent danger. Jurors delivered a mixed verdict in [a similar trial of members of the Oath Keepers militia](#). While all of them were convicted of felonies that carry heavy sentences, three of them were acquitted of sedition charges.

Prosecutors have suggested they might charge hundreds more in connection with the Jan. 6 attack. In most weeks over the past year, the investigation has taken over much of the federal courthouse in Washington, with multiple trials running at the same time and hearings in dozens of cases. An active grand jury inquiry is still under way.

Special counsel Jack Smith is examining the role Mr. Trump and his senior circle [played in trying to overturn the 2020 election results](#) after Mr. Trump [urged his supporters to amass at the Capitol](#) in protest while lawmakers were certifying President Biden's win. Mr. Trump has described [the investigation of his actions](#) as an effort by political opponents to undermine him, and he has suggested that if he wins the White House again in 2024, he might pardon some of the rioters charged.

"Our work is not done, far from it," Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco said.

The high conviction rate is in part attributable to the visual evidence defendants themselves often provided by posting their actions in real time on social media, former prosecutors said. The FBI has also been aided by friends, relatives and public sleuths who have offered tips and identified many of the rioters for investigators.

"They have lots of really good evidence to put together solid cases," said Billy Williams, a former U.S. attorney in Portland, Ore., who was in office in 2020, when more than 100 people were arrested in protests over racial injustice, some of which turned violent near a federal courthouse. About [half of those cases were ultimately dismissed](#) within a year.

About 3% of those charged in the Jan. 6 cases have opted for criminal trials rather than plea deals since the first jury verdict was reached in March. They pursued a range of defenses, including that they were swept up in the moment or wanted to heed Mr. Trump's call to protest the certification of Mr. Biden's election victory. They have seen little success.

Mr. Thompson was convicted of obstruction of an official proceeding, a felony, as well as five misdemeanors including theft of government property, illegally entering the Capitol and disorderly conduct in a Capitol building. A friend who accompanied him to the Capitol and was charged alongside him pleaded guilty and was sentenced to two months behind bars.

The two had traveled to Washington on Jan. 5, 2021, listened to part of Mr. Trump's rally and marched to the Capitol. Mr. Thompson spent a total of nine minutes in the building, during which he looted the Senate parliamentarian's office, took a video of himself celebrating with other rioters, and left with a half-empty bottle of bourbon, a coat rack and an officer's pager, according to evidence at trial. He testified at his trial that had never felt as loved as he did at Mr. Trump's rally.

When Capitol Police officers started questioning Mr. Thompson and his friend outside the building, Mr. Thompson fled while his friend talked to the officers, according to trial evidence.

Some congressional Republicans, as well as those people charged in the riot and their lawyers, have questioned whether the Justice Department's strategy of going after nearly everyone who was at the Capitol on Jan. 6 strains limited resources and amounts to overkill.

Brad Rukstales, who lost his job as chief executive of a suburban Chicago technology company after being charged with misdemeanors including disruptive conduct in a restricted building, said he felt pressure to plead to avoid the lengthy prison stays the government was threatening.

"I was a naive participant in the legal system, and so I went with the plea because I wanted to move on with my life as quickly as possible," said Mr. Rukstales, who spent a month in prison after pleading guilty to picketing in a Capitol building, one of four original charges. He has since tried to rebuild his reputation.

Judges have largely given prosecutors broad latitude. U.S. Circuit Judge Justin Walker, who was appointed to the bench by President Trump, in December criticized a defense lawyer trying to argue that prosecutors overreached in using a statute that had only been used in very different contexts previously.

"It shouldn't be surprising that there's no precedent for a prosecution," he said, citing the singular nature of the Jan. 6 attack.

Rioters have tested out other defenses, arguing they felt caught up in an event similar to Black Friday consumer mania or were part of a larger movement.

Riley Williams, a 23-year-old Pennsylvania woman, became obsessed with far-right politics during the months before the 2020 election, according to testimony from friends. At the riot, she made it to the office of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D., Calif.), encouraged rioters to steal Mrs. Pelosi's laptop and pushed against police officers. At trial, her lawyer argued she was just a young girl trying to be a "somebody."

"She lived in a fantasy world of sorts," her lawyer, a federal public defender from Harrisburg, Pa., told Washington jurors in November. She was ultimately convicted of several charges including assaulting officers, but jurors couldn't reach a verdict on other serious counts, including obstruction, which prosecutors decided to drop.

Some defendants have turned toward rebuilding their lives after their convictions.

In April, with his trial under way, Mr. Thompson and his wife, Sarah Thompson, took a lunch break at a restaurant not far from the federal courthouse in Washington. Across the room, he spotted a pair of Capitol police officers celebrating a retirement.

"He said, 'Do you think it would be OK if I offered to pay for their lunch? What do you think about that?' And I replied, 'I think if that makes you feel good and makes you feel a little bit better, I think you should do it,'" Ms. Thompson said, recalling the moment. Mr. Thompson quietly paid the officers' \$120 bill and left, she said, hoping it was a small way to make amends.

"It's been a bigger process for him to realize what really took him there and why he was there in the first place," Ms. Thompson said. Mr. Thompson, through an attorney, declined a request for an interview.

After her husband was convicted, Ms. Thompson reached out to a former member of a religious sect who now works with families looking to extract their relatives from cults to see if she could talk to her husband. Diane Benscoter, who had more recently worked with women trying to escape a sex cult, said working with Mr. Thompson was surprisingly similar to working with people in cults. His adherence to fringe conspiracy theories including QAnon entailed a form of brainwashing similar to what is seen in cult membership, she said.

"All of a sudden you feel like your life has great meaning," Ms. Benscoter said. "You are part of the people who really get what's going on."

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HEADLINE	01/02 Idaho murder suspect studied criminal mind
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/01/us/bryan-kohberger-idaho-murders.html
GIST	MOSCOW, Idaho — About two weeks before four University of Idaho students were found stabbed to death in a home near campus, Bryan Kohberger was sitting in a criminology class at a college just a short drive away, leaning into a conversation about forensics, D.N.A. and other evidence prosecutors use to win convictions.

The 28-year-old graduate student seemed highly engaged in the discussion, a former classmate recalled. It was a subject that had long captivated Mr. Kohberger, who had researched the mind-sets of criminals, studied under a professor in Pennsylvania known for her expertise on serial killers and, for the last few months, pursued a Ph.D. in criminology at Washington State University, about 10 miles from the Idaho crime scene.

Less than two months later, Mr. Kohberger would be the subject of a criminal inquiry, arrested on Friday and charged with the murder of the four Idaho students.

Investigators have yet to outline a motive, but the details emerging about Mr. Kohberger's deep interest in the psychology of criminals have opened another layer of mystery in a case that has traumatized the college town of Moscow, Idaho, and spawned countless theories from people around the country who followed the case in captivated horror.

Mr. Kohberger was taken into custody on Friday at his parents' home in Effort, Pa., and was ordered to appear at an extradition hearing on Tuesday. Jason LaBar, the public defender in Monroe County who is representing him, said Mr. Kohberger had been following the case with interest but was "shocked" to be arrested.

"He looks forward to being exonerated, is what he said," Mr. LaBar said. Mr. Kohberger, he added, would not oppose the effort to return him to Idaho to face the charges. On Sunday, Mr. LaBar issued a statement from Mr. Kohberger's parents and two sisters saying that they "love and support our son and brother" and had cooperated with the police in an effort to "promote his presumption of innocence." They also offered prayers for the victims.

Mr. Kohberger grew up in suburban eastern Pennsylvania, attending Pleasant Valley High School in Brodheadsville, where former classmates and peers recalled that he had an analytical mind but could sometimes be cruel. Thomas Arntz befriended him while riding the school bus around 2009. He said their friendship ended in 2014 after lighthearted "ribbing and jabbing" between friends turned "meanspirited," with Mr. Kohberger sometimes putting him in a headlock hold.

"Over time it just got so, so bad that I just shut down when I was around him," said Mr. Arntz, now 26. "I eventually just had to cut ties with him."

Mr. Kohberger had struggled with a heroin addiction beginning in high school but had seemed to have moved past it in recent years, friends from Pennsylvania said.

Jack Baylis, who became friends with Mr. Kohberger in eighth grade, said Mr. Kohberger had long been fascinated with why people acted the way they did and had seemed to enjoy his job as a security guard for the Pleasant Valley School District, where he worked for several years until 2021.

The last time Mr. Baylis saw Mr. Kohberger was in 2021, when they shot airsoft guns together in the Poconos. At the time, Mr. Baylis said, Mr. Kohberger drove a white Hyundai Elantra, the same model of car that the police in Moscow said had been spotted near the Idaho victims' home on the night of the attacks.

"I pray he's innocent," Mr. Baylis said.

After earning a psychology degree at a community college in 2018, Mr. Kohberger began studying psychology and later criminal justice at DeSales University, a Catholic institution in Center Valley, Pa. There, he studied in part under Katherine Ramsland, a well-known forensic psychologist whose books include "The Mind of a Murderer" and "How to Catch a Killer." She declined to comment.

Mr. Kohberger was a quiet person who liked to work alone but came across as smart, said Brittany Slaven, who took several classes with him at DeSales. She recalled an instance in one of Dr.

Ramsland's classes when students were asked to look at photos of a crime scene and figure out what happened; she said Mr. Kohberger was quick to come up with ideas.

He seemed to show a particular interest in crime scenes and serial killers, Ms. Slaven said.

"At the time it seemed as if he was just a curious student, so if his questions felt odd we didn't think much of it because it fit our curriculum," she said.

In a post on Reddit from about seven months ago, a user who identified himself as Bryan Kohberger sought people who had spent time in prison to take a survey about crimes they had committed. The survey listed Mr. Kohberger as a student investigator working with two professors at DeSales, and it asked respondents to describe their "thoughts, emotions and actions from the beginning to end of the crime commission process."

DeSales University said Mr. Kohberger had received a bachelor's degree there in 2020 and earned a master's degree in June 2022. A spokeswoman for the university said the principal investigator on the crime survey — Michelle A. Bolger, who is listed on the university website as an associate professor — and her colleagues would not be granting interviews about their experiences working with Mr. Kohberger. The assistant professor listed as the co-principal investigator, Jeffrey E. Clutter, did not respond to numerous messages.

Mr. Kohberger then moved across the country to Pullman, Wash., where he began the fall semester in August in the graduate criminology program at Washington State University, across the state border from the University of Idaho.

Early in the morning of Nov. 13, following a Saturday night of college town parties and a University of Idaho football game, four college students were found stabbed to death in the rental home in Moscow where three of them lived.

Madison Mogen, 21; Kaylee Goncalves, 21; Xana Kernodle, 20; and Ethan Chapin, 20, were attacked in at least two separate bedrooms, probably as they slept, according to investigators. The three women lived in the home; Mr. Chapin was spending the night with his girlfriend, Ms. Kernodle.

The brutal nature of the deaths — the coroner said all four were fatally stabbed with a long knife — and the lack of any suspect cast a sense of fear across Moscow, a city that had not recorded a homicide in seven years. Students began walking in groups. Residents checked the locks on their doors and windows. A DoorDash driver said she noticed more people were ordering meals delivered to avoid going out after dark. And the police began receiving a wave of calls from nervous residents: a suspicious-looking man, a driver revving an engine, sounds in the night.

Police at both college campuses added security measures, adding patrols and holding self-defense workshops.

At Washington State, Mr. Kohberger was continuing with his studies, his classmates said. B.K. Norton, who was in the same graduate program as Mr. Kohberger, said his quiet, intense demeanor had made some classmates uncomfortable.

Another student said Mr. Kohberger seemed interested in the thought processes of criminals while they committed crimes and less interested in the social factors that might lead people to do so, saying that he believed some people were just bound to break the law. The fellow student, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he feared that speaking publicly could jeopardize his safety, described Mr. Kohberger as the black sheep of the class, often taking contrarian viewpoints and sometimes getting into arguments with his peers, particularly women.

The classmate recalled one instance in which Mr. Kohberger began explaining a somewhat elementary criminology concept to a fellow doctoral student, who then accused him of “mansplaining.” A heated back-and-forth ensued and the doctoral student eventually stormed out of the classroom, he said.

Mr. Kohberger was also a teaching assistant in a criminal law class during the fall semester, said Hayden Stinchfield, 20, one of the students in that class. He said that Mr. Kohberger often cast his eyes down while addressing the students, giving the impression that he was uncomfortable.

Students said Mr. Kohberger had a strong grasp of the subject matter but was a harsh grader, giving extensive critiques of assignments and then defending the lower marks when students complained as a group. Later in the fall, roughly around the time of the killings, Mr. Stinchfield said Mr. Kohberger seemed to start giving better grades, and the assignments that once had his feedback scrawled across every paragraph began coming back clean.

“At a certain point he stopped leaving all the notes,” he said.

At the time, a growing team of investigators from local and state agencies, as well as more than 60 agents from the F.B.I., had descended on Moscow. Forensics investigators combed the house for physical evidence, including D.N.A., and searched fruitlessly for a murder weapon.

Officials pleaded for tips and videos, while thousands of internet sleuths around the country suggested an array of people as the likely culprit: a former boyfriend of one of the victims, a man who was with two of the victims when they got a meal from a food truck, two roommates who were in the home when the killings occurred but apparently slept through them.

None of the online discussion groups identified Mr. Kohberger. It is not clear how or whether he knew the victims.

The police had tried to tamp down rumors by ruling out several people as suspects, though accusations were flying so fast that it at times appeared they could not do so quickly enough. They withheld nearly all details of the investigation, raising frustrations and prompting some people, including relatives of the victims, to wonder publicly whether the police were up to the task.

Still, investigators worked through the holidays to process thousands of tips and extensive evidence collected in and around the scene. In announcing Mr. Kohberger’s arrest on Friday, Moscow’s police chief, James Fry, said investigators had located a white Hyundai Elantra but had not yet found a murder weapon.

Chief Fry looked exhausted and almost tearful as he announced the arrest at a news conference, making it clear that investigators were still looking for tips to help resolve the questions they could not yet answer: Did the suspect act alone? What was the motive?

“Be assured the work is not done,” Chief Fry said. “This is just getting started.”

The arrest left the members of one Facebook discussion group, with more than 166,000 members, stunned.

“I’m baffled,” one woman wrote. “Literally everything we know doesn’t make sense.”

But it has also brought a sense of relief to many in Idaho.

Ms. Goncalves’s family members said through a lawyer that they were “relieved that the authorities have someone in custody, and now the journey through the criminal justice system begins.”

Katie Blomgren, who is studying psychology at the University of Idaho, had known Ms. Goncalves and Ms. Mogen since she was 11. She spent her 12th birthday with the two girls in a hotel, and she thinks of

	<p>them every time she looks down at her shins, where she has two scars from trying to jump from a bathtub onto a bed that night. She said she has struggled to feel closure, even after the arrest of Mr. Kohberger.</p> <p>“There’s relief, in feeling like maybe it’s not so scary to live here anymore,” said Ms. Blomgren, 21. But while an arrest in the case has brought a sense of relief for many of her fellow students, she said she has struggled to find any peace. “For me, it doesn’t erase what happened.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/01 Alabama NYE shooting: 1 dead, 9 hurt
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/mobile-alabama-shooting-one-dead-new-years-eve-e2ea9c372a28c08547530f82a096d3ab
GIST	<p>MOBILE, Ala. (AP) — One person was killed and nine hurt in a shooting a few blocks away from where thousands were in the streets for a New Year’s Eve party in downtown Mobile, Alabama, police said.</p> <p>TV news footage showed police officers running and on horseback rushing to the area where the shooting took place about 45 minutes before midnight Saturday.</p> <p>Neither the name of the person killed nor the conditions of the nine people taken to the hospital have been released by police.</p> <p>The shooting happened a few blocks away from the main stage for the Moon Pie Over Mobile festival. The event continued on with fireworks and a moon pie dropping from a downtown building at midnight to mark the start of 2023,</p> <p>The shooter and the person killed appeared to know each other, Mobile Police Chief Paul Prine told reporters near the scene.</p> <p>“It would give some comfort to all of us downtown that this was not just a random shooting,” Prine said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/01 Motive in NYE attack on NYPD officers?
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/new-york-city-law-enforcement-eric-adams-488d87d684f21d0a21bbb593743d0910
GIST	<p>NEW YORK (AP) — Authorities in New York City are investigating whether a man who attacked three police officers with a machete at a New Year’s Eve celebration, striking two of them, was inspired by radical Islamic extremism, according to a law enforcement official familiar with the matter.</p> <p>The attack happened a little after 10 p.m. about eight blocks from Times Square, just outside the high-security zone where revelers are screened for weapons. Two of the officers were struck with the machete before an officer shot the man in the shoulder. The two officers were hospitalized, one with a fractured skull and the other with a bad cut, and were expected to recover.</p> <p>Police did not publicly identify the 19-year-old suspect, but the law enforcement official identified him to The Associated Press as Trevor Bickford, of Wells, Maine.</p> <p>Investigators believe Bickford traveled to New York City earlier in the week and are examining whether he came to New York specifically to attack police officers at one of the largest New Year’s celebrations in the world, the law enforcement official said.</p> <p>New York City police and federal officials are still trying to discern a motive, and investigators have been reviewing Bickford’s online postings, which included some mentions of Islamic extremist views, the official said. The official could not publicly discuss details of the ongoing investigation and spoke to AP on condition of anonymity.</p>

Bickford was expected to recover from the gunshot wound. No charges against him were immediately announced.

Michael Driscoll, the assistant director in charge of the FBI's New York field office, said the FBI's Joint Terrorist Task Force in New York City was investigating but investigators believe the attacker acted alone.

The attack and sound of a gunshot briefly sent some people running, but the festivities in Times Square continued uninterrupted.

Mayor Eric Adams said at a news conference early Sunday that he spoke to one of the wounded officers as he was being stitched up at the hospital.

"He was in good spirits," Adams said. "He understood that his role saved lives of New Yorkers today."

The NYPD mounts a massive security operation every year to keep the New Year's Eve crowd safe. Thousands of officers are sent to the area, including many new recruits. One of the injured officers just graduated from the police academy on Friday, the mayor said.

The blocks where the biggest crowds gather to see performances and the midnight ball drop can be accessed only through checkpoints where officers use metal-detecting wands to screen for weapons. Large bags and coolers are banned. Barriers are set up to prevent vehicle attacks.

The security perimeter extends only so far, though. The attack took place on 8th Avenue, which is often packed with people navigating around the frozen zone or trying to find one of the secure entrances.

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HEADLINE	01/02 Dozens escape Mexico prison in attack
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2023/01/02/mexico-prison-escape-attack/4241672646308/
GIST	<p>Jan. 2 (UPI) -- Authorities in Mexico said two dozen inmates have escaped a prison in the northern city of Juarez during a New Year's Day riot at the facility, which was sparked by a suspected coordinated attack.</p> <p>The Attorney General's Office of the State of Chihuahua said in a statement that the riot began at about 7 a.m. Sunday when gunmen aboard armored vehicles arrived at the penitentiary and opened fire on security officers.</p> <p>A total of 14 people, including 10 security and prison guards, were killed in the attack, along with four inmates, the office said.</p> <p>Twenty-four inmates were able to escape the facility and "used what happened to carry out actions against antagonistic groups," the office said.</p> <p>Another 13 inmates were injured, including 10 who've been identified by the authorities.</p> <p>Prior to the shootout at the facility, armed attacks were reported against police on Manuel Gomez Morin Avenue, resulting in a chase that lead to the capture of four men in a Ford Expedition vehicle.</p> <p>An attack also occurred on Panamericana Avenue that security forces were able to thwart, authorities said, while reporting the deaths of two suspects aboard a Hummer.</p> <p>The attorney general's office said several security agencies including the Mexican army and the National Guard have been deployed to maintain order and control of the situation.</p> <p>Chihuahua Gov. Maru Campos said via Twitter on Sunday that during the attack she deployed land and air resources to protect civilians on the streets with the army and the State Investigation Agency intervening in the prison where they "successfully managed to regain control."</p>

	<p>"What happened is very unfortunate, and now more than ever we must reinforce the commitment to work together to send a forceful message to the generators of violence: there is the rule of law, and no one can violate that law and get away with it," she said.</p> <p>"I send my solidarity to the families of the elements that unfortunately lost their lives. We are all hurt by these acts of cowardice; but above all, I send my commitment to work to do justice to the heroism of our fallen elements in the live of duty."</p> <p>The attack comes after 11 people were killed, including a 4-year-old boy, in the streets of Juarez following a similar riot that erupted at the facility between two drug cartels in August.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/01 NYPD officers hurt in NYE machete attack
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2023/01/01/NY-Three-NYPD-officers-injured-machete-attack-Times-Square/3131672580203/
GIST	<p>Jan. 1 (UPI) -- Three New York City Police Department officers were struck by a man wielding a machete in an unprovoked attack near Times Square about two hours before the midnight Sunday, according to the NYPD commissioner.</p> <p>In Mobile, Ala., a 24-year-old man was killed and nine others were injured, ranging from 17 to 57, in a shooting at 11:15p.m., just blocks from where people had gathered for the city's New Year's Eve celebration, according to WPML. No arrests have been made.</p> <p>And in Ocala, Fla., two people died and four others were injured in a shooting in Ocala around 4:30 a.m. Sunday, where a crowd of about 100 people were gathered, police said in a news release. Davonta Harris, 30, and Abdul Hakeem Van Croskey, 24, were identified by the police as the two people killed about 75 miles northwest of Orlando.</p> <p>The NYPD officers were taken to Bellevue Hospital Center and later released. The attack occurred before 10 p.m. and West 52nd Street and Eighth Avenue, outside a Times Square New Year's Eve security screening zone, Commissioner Keechant Sewell said during a news conference.</p> <p>Polcie only identified the suspect as 19 years old but CNN and WNBC-TV reported he is Trevor Bickford of Maine and he carried a handwritten diary, which expressed his desire to join the Taliban in Afghanistan and die as a martyr.</p> <p>Sewell said he approached an officer and attempted to strike him over the head with a machete. Then, he struck two additional officers before one fired his weapon, striking the suspect in the shoulder.</p> <p>"Due to a police investigation avoid West 52nd St and 8th Avenue in Manhattan," NYPD posted on Twitter on Saturday night. "Expect a police presence in the area and residual traffic delays in the surrounding area."</p> <p>During an early morning news conference, Mike Driscoll, the FBI assistant director in charge of the New York field office, said: "I want to be very clear ... there is no ongoing threat.</p> <p>"We believe this was a sole individual at this time. There is nothing to indicate otherwise."</p> <p>Law enforcement officials said they are looking into whether the suspect had previously posted what they called jihadist writings online and traveled to New York City to target police.</p> <p>The FBI is working with the FBI, NYPD and Joint Terrorism Task Force.</p>

	<p>One officer, who recently graduated from the city's police academy, suffered a skull fracture and a large laceration to his head, Sewell said. An eight-year veteran suffered a laceration, the commissioner said. The to the third officer were not given.</p> <p>New York Mayor Eric Adams, who was on hand for the celebratory crystal ball drop, said responding officers immediately secured the scene and acted "with a level of professionalism that we expect from all of our officers."</p> <p>Responding officers returned to their posts "because we still had a city we had to protect," Adams said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/01 Tacoma violent crimes increased in 2022
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/tacoma-crime-increased-in-2022-tpd-has-a-crime-reduction-plan-for-the-new-year
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. - As violent crime trends upward, Tacoma Police are committed to renewing their efforts to reduce violent crimes by developing what they say is a violence reduction strategy based on the best available science.</p> <p>Crime was on the rise in Tacoma throughout 2022.</p> <p>On Saturday, officers were called to a domestic violence incident, and took a 32-year-old man into custody. A day prior, they shot and killed an armed man during a shootout.</p> <p>"Yeah, [crime] has been on the rise this year. It's been on the rise since 2020 and, you know, it's really concerning," said Pierce County Sgt. Darren Moss. "We don't want violence in the streets."</p> <p>Between Dec. 19–25 alone, there were 47 domestic violence offenses reported to police. Those account for nearly 60% of all assaults in that timeframe. Weapons laws violations increased more than 25% in 2022, according to documents obtained by the City of Tacoma.</p> <p>Violent crimes are trending upwards. Tacoma Police Department is committed to renewing its efforts to reduce violent crimes by developing a violence reduction strategy based on best available science, according to the 2023 Tacoma Crime Reduction Plan.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/01 Seattle deadly shootings increased in 2022
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/number-of-seattle-deadly-shootings-increased-in-2022-crime-violent-violence-police-deaths-officers-crime-chinatown-city
GIST	<p>SEATTLE, Wash. — Seattle saw a dramatic rise in violent crime in 2022, including gun violence. The Seattle Police Crime Dashboard shows the number of shooting deaths went up by more than 20% when compared to the same time frame the year prior.</p> <p>People ringing in the New Year Sunday said they are hoping the city can get a handle on violent crime in 2023.</p> <p>“There has been a lot of shootings lately, which is unfortunate,” said Johnny Nguyen of Seattle.</p> <p>Seattle police data shows a 23% increase in shooting deaths citywide last year with 38 deaths, with the most in the Chinatown-International district, then Bitterlake.</p> <p>It's a devastating reality, but not surprising to Crime Stoppers Puget Sound Director Jim Fuda.</p> <p>“It's a bigger focus now with less police on the street and then you've got the courts letting violent offenders out,” Fuda explained.</p>

Return to Top	<p>This data comes at a time when police are still short about 400 officers. Chief Adrian Diaz addressed the staffing crisis last week in the wake of a violent attack on a bus rider at troubled Third and Pine.</p> <p>“Right now, while we don’t have enough officers, we’re actually putting them in the right place,” Diaz explained.</p> <p>Fuda and others strongly believe the city is on the right track.</p> <p>“I actually spoke with the chief the other night. When you are hiring officers that represents this community, that’s how some of this trust gets built back,” Fuda stated. “When you hire an officer today, it’s at least 18 months before that person can be a viable one-person police car, so it’s going to take some time to build up.”</p> <p>There were 151 non-deadly shootings reported through November in 2022. That's 25 more than the year before, according to the dashboard.</p> <p>KOMO was unable to get a comment from Seattle Police Department on New Years Day.</p>
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